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SHOOTING AND FISHING TRIPS.

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SHOOTING AND FISHING TRIPS.

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LONDON:

CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

HOOTING AND FISHING TRIPS

N ENGLAND, FRANCE, ALSACE, BELGIUM, HOLLAND, AND BAVARIA.

BY

"WILDFOWLER," "SNAPSHOT."

LEWIS CLEMENT

SECOND EDITION.

London:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1878.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS
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INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION.

THE contents of the present volume are taken from, and, in fact, form but a slightly abridged edition of, my "Shooting and Fishing Trips in England, France, Alsace, Belgium, Holland, and Bavaria," which were published, in two volumes, in the autumn of 1876. That edition having been speedily exhausted, it was thought desirable to bring out another, in a cheaper form; hence the book which I have now the pleasure of introducing to the sporting public.

Originally, all the chapters herein contained appeared in the form of articles, contributed by me under my two well-known *noms de plume*, in *Bell's Life in London*, *The Sporting Gazette*, and *The Country*; and I take this fresh opportunity of cordially thanking the proprietors and editors of those papers.

I cannot forbear also tendering my most hearty thanks to my many correspondents for their very flattering letters, fully endorsing all my hints and descriptions, and kindly wishing me every success. I am

most pleased to have their approval, and am most grateful to them for their good wishes.

Respecting the reviews which were originally given of my "Shooting and Fishing Trips," they were simply charmingly flattering and startlingly unanimous; and it must be peculiarly gratifying to the reviewers to find that their eminently favourable verdicts have been so thoroughly and so freely endorsed by the sporting public. I trust that the present abridged edition will be looked upon with equal favour, and I now leave it in the hands of the literary and sporting world.

THE AUTHOR.

London, 1878.

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SHOOTING AND FISHING TRIPS.

SHOOTING IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

A PLEA FOR SHOOTING.

A GREAT deal, of late, has been said and has been written against shooting. It has been denounced as unnatural, cruel, useless, and absurd; whereas, I maintain that, carried on in a sportsmanlike (*i.e.* manly) manner, it is, first, perfectly natural; secondly, not a whit more cruel than ox-slaughter; thirdly, it is quite as necessary; fourthly, there is no more absurdity in the sport than there is in croquet playing or any other pastimes, but perhaps rather far less.

If the prejudiced reader will kindly lend me his attention, and listen to my arguments, I have some strong hopes of converting him to my way of thinking. I will take up and consider my assertions, one after the other, in the order in which I have named them.

First, then, let me prove that shooting is quite a natural pursuit in some men.

Without reverting to the well-known fact that from the remotest antiquity men have, from instinct, so to speak, pursued game with passionate enthusiasm, I will take, as my instances, cases of everyday occurrence.

There are, everybody will admit, families in whom the blood seems to have a tendency for sports—families whose sons show,

from the tenderest age, a strong inclination for the gun and its concomitants. This inclination is a natural feature in their constitution. Was not this taste implanted in their natures by Providence? Therefore, is it not quite natural that, all other things permitting, they should indulge in that for which they crave so ardently? These young men take to shooting as naturally as a duckling takes to water, as a young pointer comes to stand at game, and as a true-bred hound pup takes to following a scent the moment he is intelligent enough to relish its odour, courageous enough to attempt reaching his game, and strong enough to bear the strain. What taught the duckling that water was its element? Nature. What told the young pointer to wind his birds cautiously, and what petrifies him, so to speak, on his stand? Nature. What makes the young hound rush on the trail, open-mouthed and loud-voiced? Nature. What makes a young fellow of sporting descent listen with sparkling eyes and wide-open ears to all recitals of deeds with the gun by his seniors? Nature. What makes him wish that he, too, could emulate those worthy "fowlers" in the field? Nature. He does not know himself what makes him so fond of the pursuit; there is an instinct in him that prompts him to enter into it, and he only obeys the call of Nature in doing so; *therefore shooting is quite natural. Ce qu'il fallait démontrer.*

Shooting is not cruel. This is my second proposition. Every wild animal, as well as any other living being, must some day die, either of old age or violently. Now, dying of old age means for wild animals dying of starvation—no pleasant death. On the other hand, it is well known that game birds and animals have an almost endless variety of natural enemies to contend against. For, whatever may say some enthusiasts, the hawk and the weasel tribes can account for very nearly every head of game that disappears from a manor. Now, no one will, I hope, contend that death comes pleasantly from the talons and beak of a hawk, or from the claws and sharp teeth of a polecat. If some people should think it, let me honestly warn them that they are wrong in their surmise. I have been for years the unwilling witness of such cases, and the deaths, thereby brought about, are most painful and most dreadful; the rapacious birds of prey, or the ferocious carnivorous animals, seem to delight in torturing their victims; it appears to be in their nature to keep them alive as long as possible, and they tear them to pieces, or suck their life's blood, whilst their victims' bodies are writhing in agony. Is not this a cruel death? Is it not, by far, more cruel than the shot that kills the bird on the spot? or if it fails in doing so, the shooters

at once mercifully put an end to the bird's sufferings, for none but cads of the lowest type keep wounded birds in their bags or pockets. Such conduct is cowardly, cruel, and unsportsmanlike, and is stigmatised by every rational man as a most abominable action. There are few such cases, and, surely, the large body of shooters cannot be made answerable for the misdeeds of a few miscreants, who are no more worthy of being called shooters than the man in the moon. Murderers and torturers would be a far more fit appellation for them, and there ought to be some way of applying the *Lex Talionis* to such. However, these cases, being very rare exceptions, only prove in favour of the rule, and it is universally admitted that game is killed with as little pain as can possibly be inflicted. Therefore, shooting must be absolved from the charge of needless cruelty. The birds must be killed, and shooting them is the most merciful way of doing it that can be devised. Some people have advocated netting the birds, and then twisting their necks. If these kindly-disposed persons had ever seen birds being netted, the sight would have quickly dispelled such notions. I have seen it performed by professional men, and that means that it was expeditiously and scientifically done; the birds, nevertheless, suffer more agony at their hands than they do when killed in what I call our legitimate way, simply for this reason, that the moment a bird feels himself caught, the moment he finds himself confined within the treacherous meshes, he dashes himself here, there, and everywhere, in the hope of somehow getting out of harm's way; he hangs himself very often, not to suffer death, but a kind of half strangulation, that, judging from their outward appearance, it was not nice to undergo. Finally, his turn came—he was seized, and his sufferings were put to an end. All this is far more complicated, and entails far more suffering to the birds than shooting them; *therefore shooting is the most humane course to pursue where the necessary killing of wild birds or animals is concerned.*

That this killing of wild birds and animals is necessary (third proposition) is self-evident on the barest examination of the matter. Wild birds and wild animals are intended for man's food. It was never purposed that they should breed, merely to feed hawks or polecats, or to die a natural death, if these unrelenting foes of theirs would give them the chance. But the plain fact is, such is not the case. Providence has wisely created weasels, hawks, and the like, on purpose to destroy the aged, weak, or diseased birds or animals, and prevent the spread of disease among their kind; in short, all predatory animals and birds, are the natural scavengers of our fields. There ends, or ought to end,

their mission. They ought merely to glean what would not be good for us in many instances, thereby leaving a healthy and strong stock fit for our use. If, therefore, we did not collect the wholesome birds and animals, we should be wilfully ignoring the provisions of nature; consequently, *when we shoot birds and animals we only do our duty*; and that was what I wished to point out.

As to the alleged absurdity of going out shooting, I confess that, when I look around on all our other pastimes, I can hardly pick out which is the more absurd, *if considered from a superhuman point of view*; and this, I presume, is the high standing ground from which our foes criticise our pursuits. For instance, what is the good of a cricket match? To see a lot of men clothed in flannels, pitching a ball, knocking it about, and then running after it, would not seem a very rational performance to a demi-god, certainly. Croquet is not in any way more sublime; hammering different-coloured balls under hoops and against bells has nothing very rational in it, has it? Dancing is equally silly, for turning like marionettes and spinning like teetotums constitute a ball; and it looks, no doubt, very stupid to those who dislike it, but seems sensible enough to those who *do* like it; and there the whole point of the argument remains. And, as regards shooting, how can people who, for aught we know to the contrary, are perhaps, gun-shy (*i.e.* afraid of a gun, even when not loaded), or who, perhaps, have not the slightest notion of how shooting is carried on and what it is like—how, I repeat, can such people criticise our pursuit, and judge rightly of its merits or demerits? It is a matter of impossibility. Such men are not fit for the task they have set unto themselves. Moreover, no written or verbal argument will convince a man who has made up his mind not to be convinced, unless eventually his heart takes sides against his head, and the passion of the sport overrules the stubborn pride of preconceived notions.

Howbeit, as far as we, shooters, are concerned, we have as a body the greatest respect for other people's pursuits and fancies, on the principle that *chacun prend son plaisir où il le trouve*, and that it is useless to discuss about tastes; then, why should we not claim a similar regard towards our own pursuit? We love our guns, we love our dogs, we love our sport. If there were any excuses needed, our enthusiasm ought to plead in our favour, and absolve us in all unprejudiced minds; but no such excuses are required; when we are shooting, we are merely doing what we ought to do; by provisioning the markets with game we perform a useful part of our duties, and such being the case we ought to be encouraged,

instead of being mocked at, and derided, by individuals whose dislike to our sport lies, in many instances, in the fact that they neither have the moral courage to handle firearms, nor the pluck and stamina that are necessary to make of a man a good and successful sportsman.

Shooting, in the true acceptation of the term, is essentially an honest, harmless, invigorating, manly pastime. So much cannot be said of many other pursuits. Moreover, shooting makes a man feel what he really is, because it puts him on a level with other men. Hunting claims also this prerogative, I know, but there is a mistake there. The well-to-do hunting man, mounted on the best horse that money can procure, if willing, is generally able to distance his poorer *confrères*, who are mounted on screws, and he knows it. Such a thing cannot happen when shooting. He who is there the most successful, is not, as a matter of course, the man who has the handling of the most costly weapon; he must have individual skill if he wishes to shine, and many a poor man, with his cheap gun, can wipe his richer brother-knights-of-the-trigger's eyes, notwithstanding their titles, their attendants, and their fine guns. And this is as it ought to be. Everyone, especially some rich men, ought to be reminded that they, too, are men. If taken in the right spirit, such gentle reminders act beneficially on the mind.

Now, in conclusion, let me hint that all thorough shooters are perfect enthusiasts, and that our passion for sport has such deep roots in our natures that no amount of chaff or of impertinence can ever drive it from our hearts. It is a passion strong even in death, and, unlike other passions, it never ruins our health, our minds, or our fortunes. Our love of sport never deserts us, and it cheers us at all times; we can always revert to it with pleasure; there are no sore hearts there, no heartburnings, no reproaches of conscience, everything in it is bright, right, and aboveboard, and I sincerely hope that, for their own sakes, our antagonists may hit upon such an honest passion, and stick to it to their last breath. If it proves to them as great a consolation as shooting proves to all of us, truly it will be a godsend to them.

As far as I am concerned, shooting, to me, is a sovereign panacea to anything bad or ill that may befall me. When I was a young fellow, I fell desperately in love several times. The course of my loves (in true accordance with the general rules of such affairs) did not run smooth. Do you think I fretted about it? If so, you would be mistaken. When my engagements came to an end I took up my gun, whistled my dogs, and I went out shooting. I came home at night very tired, very hungry, very sleepy; I ate,

I drank, I went to bed, and I got up the next day, none the worse for my having been jilted.

Later on, several times, I lost money. Wiser people than I am would have taken to tearing their hair by the root. This would not have improved their financial difficulties, though it might have given them, subsequently, occasion to use some hair-restorer; but I, in my simple wisdom, went out shooting again, and my grief blew over, as I blazed away at the snipe in our marsh.

Then I had a friend who went wrong. I felt so awfully grieved that I thought I could never forget it.

But, bless you, all these things are now blown over, forgotten, blotted out, and these magical performances were brought about merely by going out shooting.

Try then my remedy, kind reader, and your sorrows, your affairs, your bothers, your *ennuis*, will all be obliterated from your mind.

Shooting will give you health, strength, cheerful spirits, and a right view of things. Then, what more can you want? Nothing. And now, tell me, is there another pursuit of which as much could be said? There is none.

Then, follow my advice, and take to shooting. You will never regret it; and if, some day, you should experience the healing powers (both for the mind and for the body) of this my universal panacea, remember the shooter who gave you the advice, and toast him with right good will after your recovery.

CHAPTER II.

A DAY'S RABBITING IN DERBYSHIRE.

At the beginning of every August, I am subject to a fit of "fidgets" respecting my guns and shooting-traps, and I like to air both, under the slightest provocation, so as to get myself into good trim and training for the more serious work which is ushered in by the glorious twelfth.

Well, in the first week of that month, last year, I had been buying some cartridges at a gunsmith's shop in the Strand, not 200 yards from *Bell's Life* office, when, who should I see walking leisurely along, but an old country chum of mine! There he was, with his soft felt hat at the back of his head, staring at everything he saw, with that enviable astonishment which country folk are so wont to exhibit on their countenances when brought face to face with the London sights and traffic.

Our surprise at meeting thus, so unexpectedly, was mutual.

"I thought you were at home airing your dogs," I said to him.

"I despaired of finding you in town at this late time of the year," said he, "else I would have called."

Then I asked him the news. His governor had settled on their Yorkshire estate, and the Derbyshire farm, over which we had sported together so many times, was now his, for good and for ever.

"I wish you would come down," said he. "Your room is still at your disposal, and ever will be; so, pray, don't be shy, but drop in at any time you like."

"Well, but," I said selfishly, "what should I go for just now? there is nothing to be done yet by your place."

"Yes there is," he replied. "I can get you leave to fish in the stream in the valley for as long as you choose to stay."

"I know that stream of old, my boy," I remarked, "and there is not much to be done by it. Thank you all the same, but fishing

and catching nothing is not entertaining, as you well know, for many a time you and I have whipped that confounded water, for hours together, to no purpose."

"True," said he, "then I could give you some rabbit-shooting."

At this I became all attention. Rabbit-shooting is, in my estimation, a sport not to be despised, when you are not with a lot of reckless shooters, and can enjoy the sport quietly. So I questioned my companion.

"We shall be all by ourselves," he answered.

"And are there really many rabbits?"

"Plenty," he said; "in fact, old Joe, the farmer, came to the hall the other day, and asked me when I thought of coming round to put them down; so there must be a rare lot of them, for old Joe is no grumbler, and he would not hint at their being a nuisance to him unless they really were. Now, say the word, and you and I will do the job."

"Very well, that is understood."

I took him to the Royal. in Regent Street, and we had a quiet dinner by ourselves. Met again at the St. Pancras Station in the evening and booked ourselves for Derby. He had telegraphed our arrival, so that his man was at the station when we arrived, somewhere about 10 o'clock. It was a lovely night, and the drive, some ten miles along the country lanes, was a most pleasant one. Finally, we drew up into the old yard, where all the dogs had congregated to give us a friendly reception.

Early in the morning, too early to my liking, a sprightly cock on the *qui vive*, began crowing, bless his little heart! Then the sheep began bleating, the dogs barked, horses neighed, a cart or two went by, rolling heavily, and clattered their chains without mercy; the sun finally came into my room, and actually dropped, through the window, a dazzling ray on my "weather" eye.

"Better get up," I thought, "than lie here tossing about, like Charlie's boat in a Channel storm;" and with this sensible resolution, I jumped out of bed. I went to the window, threw it wide open (it had been all night half opened; I always like plenty of air, and never shut my window), and the sight that met my gaze, as I stood there stretching myself and yawning, was really worth getting up for, for the sun was sending its light in the valley below, and the stream and its scenery looked very bewitching.

I heard Gervase, my friend, talking to someone in the yard, so I called out my morning greeting.

"Come down," said he, "and have a drop!"

"No, thanks; no drops for me."

"I never take any myself," he explained, "but I did not know whether you would like some."

"No; I do very well indeed without, and I think I am all the better for it. Morning tippling I do not understand, whatever other people's tastes may be."

"Well," he said, "make haste and come down to breakfast then."

In a quarter of an hour's time I was ready. In the hall I met the old keeper with a creel slung on his back, and two or three rabbit-spaniels at his heels.

"Ah sir," said he, "what a long time it is since we last saw you! You are giving up your old friends for new ones, I am afraid."

"Not at all," I said, warmly shaking his hand (for he is a worthy man is old Simpson, and I had shaken hands with many a worse one since last I parted with him); "well," I added admiringly, "you *do* look well, by Jove! You look younger than ever, upon my word!"

Which, indeed, seems to be the fact.

"Hem!" he said contentedly, "I feels bright enough, sure-ly, if it was not for them rheumatics in my left knee. That is through kneeling too much at the earth, sir; the damp gets into one's legs, and there you are!"

My friend is a bachelor, and his establishment is accordingly conducted on somewhat loose and lax principles, of which I will give an instance, at the risk of shocking the numerous old dowagers who read my lucubrations.

Well, not only was the keeper with his dogs and ferrets allowed to enter the hall, but they actually were all called into the breakfast parlour, where each took his ease.

Shocking, is it not? But very picturesque and pleasant, I can assure you.

While we were discussing our meal, Simpson had a glass or two of home-brewed, and enlivened us with his stock of lore.

"Them ferrets," said he to me, pointing to his fishing basket, which he had placed on the floor in a corner, "are bred from yours, sir."

"Indeed," I said, highly interested.

"Yes," he went on. "Do you remember when you went away the last time you were here, leaving three of your ferrets along with me, a polecat, and two white does?"

"Yes, I think I recollect something of the sort," I replied with my mouth full.

"Well, they bred rare good 'uns, they did, them ferrets, and

do you know," he added, in a stage whisper, stooping confidentially towards me, and looking towards the door, as though he were afraid lest the servant should come in and overhear him, "everybody for miles and miles comes to me for some of 'em, but I keeps it select, I do, and none but good men get 'em; they are prized, they are."

"Of course," I inquired, "the old ones are dead?"

"Oh yes; died years ago—two or three years at least; but I say, sir, that polecat of yours was a devil. Yes, he was," he added, emphatically; "do you know, sir, one day he got loose at home, and he bit the wife and all the children, and myself!"

This "myself" was pronounced whilst the worthy man's eyebrows were upraised into his hair, and his finger was pointing at his own breast, as though, to that very day, he could not comprehend the "cheek" of a ferret daring to bite him.

Meanwhile, we had got very creditably through our meal, and collaring the guns, out we went, the "bolters" being led until time for action.

"Try, first, the spinney near the oatfield, Simpson," was my friend's order.

"All right, sir."

A path separated the said spinney from the above-mentioned field, and I knew that path right well.

"Will you take it?" asked my friend.

"By all means," I replied, and I went, whilst he and the keeper went round the spinney.

Whilst I was standing by the stile a wood-pigeon came and sat on an elm-tree close to me. I rattled him down, and when I went to pick him up I nearly trod on a rabbit. He, however, was almost equal to the occasion, for he dashed into a "road," under brambles, with the speed of a flash of lightning, and, for the time being, nonplussed me; but he was not satisfied—would not leave well alone—and must needs try whether he could cross the open path before my shot could reach him. A sad experiment, rashly undertaken, which ended fatally, for, as he was darting through, I fired, and bundled him on his nose, when he turned round to give up his rabbit's ghost, and seemed to say that it was not fair to hit him whilst his back was turned. But then, that was his fault; why did he run away?

I picked him up, put him out of the way on the stile, and kept my eyes "skinned," for the dogs were in, and a double shot plainly intimated that the fun had begun.

One of the spaniels came my way. I pointed out a "road" in the field; he took it directly, and presently he gave tongue.

These rabbiting spaniels do give tongue, so don't let our sit-on-the-rule swells start up in pious horror, and decree that the sport was inadmissible if the dogs made themselves heard. They did, and were expected to. For good rabbiting you want a dog that bolts the rabbits well, and that warns you well, and whatever theoretical people may say, that is how, practically, the thing is done.

Well, out came one bunny, but he, like a donkey that he was, instead of making good his exit under covert, stopped to listen on the path. Now, curiosity, injudiciously indulged in, was the cause of the perdition of our mother Eve, and it was also the cause of that rabbit going to the bad, for whilst he was wondering what on earth the dog was up to, amidst the standing crop, I sent him one ounce and ¼ of number six shot, of which he received and kept the best part. Thereupon, the dog tumbled on deceased and shook him well, but all these primitive attempts at resuscitation proving futile, he gave up the thing as a bad job, and brought deceased to me to see if I should be more successful. At least, that is what I think he expected I would try to do, for he stood there, gaping at me, whilst I held the rabbit, as though he expected me to perform a legerdemain trick with it.

I put up the rabbit with his *confrère*, and a slap soundly administered on the dog's nose settled his doubts as to what would be, for him, the best course to pursue. He returned forthwith to his duty, and I resumed my watch. Gervase was getting on very well in the ride, judging from his frequent shots, and when he reached me he had ten bunnies to the good. I had only four and my wood-pigeon.

Said Gervase: "We will rest a bit, and ferret the earths in the spinney, shall we?"

Of course, I was most willing, and as we did not ask the rabbits' opinion on that point, the proposal was carried *à l'unanimité.*

The proposed rest consisted in our drinking each a quart of home-brewed, more or less, after which Simpson dived his hand into the creel and brought out the ferrets to be muzzled, an operation to which they, true to the blood of their ancestor, the polecat, objected most strongly, but to no purpose, for the old man was too great an adept at the art to be bamboozled long by any ferret, devil or not, as he expressed it. This done, we prepared for a move.

"There be a large earth at the foot of the big tree," said Simpson, "and that earth is well-nigh full of 'em up to the brim. I saw five getting in, anyhow, whilst we were beating the spinney. Shall we go there first?"

His master, who had at the time his nose in a glass and his elbow in the air, shut his eyes as a sign of assent, and when he had done, we all went. The earth was pierced with many holes, too many in fact to be an easy earth to ferret; but there was no choice in the matter; it was either to put them in or leave it alone, so we signed to Simpson, who placed the four ferrets at four different "mouths," and then silently withdrew behind the tree, taking the dogs with him, out of harm's way.

Now, this was truly rabbit-shooting under difficulties, for the direct neighbourhood of the earth was a confused mass of thorny and brambly covert, through which it was rather hard to follow the runners, therefore, no one need be surprised when I state that we missed more bunnies than we bagged.

"We will find them out afterwards with the dogs," remarked my friend, "and those who have gone to earth in the bank will be readily bolted by the ferrets in the open. So what is deferred is not lost, they will all come to bag."

We saw at least fourteen rabbits coming out of the large earth, and only five were killed, although all were fired at. It was rare good fun.

We then went to a smaller earth, on a sort of bank, and by standing behind the holes, on the top of the bank, we bundled them over well. This ferreting of the spinney took us the best part of the morning.

We then went home to lunch, and when we resumed operations, the bank opposite the meadow and bordering the wood was the next field of action. There, we had an open space in front of the holes, and consequently the scoring was fast and furious. Four ferrets, good ones, working four different holes at the same time, in a place where rabbits are teeming, give two guns plenty of work to attend to, each time a fresh set of holes is tried. I got my cartridges loose in my pockets, so as to reach them more easily; but notwithstanding that we both looked "uncommonly sharp," several rabbits managed to come out in the nick of time, when we had just fired, and they escaped before we could have a salute ready for them.

Only one dog was with us for that work; it was a colley bitch, small in size, short on the legs, but with a long body, and remarkably swift. She did not allow a single cripple to escape, though some of them tried hard, and one she actually nabbed, just as he was going to tumble into his hole.

In the midst of our fusillade the farmer came round, rubbing his hands and looking all smiles. He and I used to be great chums, so that we had quite lively greetings to exchange.

Of course, we had to go to the farm and see the good-wife, and have a drain. Simpson left about a dozen rabbits at the farm larder, for which he, surreptitiously, got a half-crown slipped into his hand by old Joe, and we went back to our guns.

There were several earths in the meadow, and, in these, several bunnies had taken refuge, diving in them headlong, as only pursued rabbits can dive. The ferrets, however, proved a sore thorn in their sides, and out they had to go, for, although muzzled, the carnivoræ desperately attacked the obstinate ones, scratching their fur off their back and legs when they would not stir and persisted in blocking the way.

Thus, one of the last I bagged had one thigh scratched quite raw, through his having obstinately declined to move when the ferret was urgently pressing him to do so. It seems that he was into an open tunnel, at one end of which the ferret had got in, whilst the colley bitch was pointing her sharp muzzle at the other end, so that, between the two, bunny did not know what to do. Howbeit, the colley getting impatient, after some scratching at the burrow, went to look and sniff at the other side. Bunny thought such a chance of escaping might never happen again, and took advantage of it, only to find that he had reckoned without his host, the gun, who was watching hard by. Such is a bunny's life.

Well, we cleared the farm in rare style, and if old Joe gets bothered by rabbits for some time to come, it will not be our fault, anyhow.

We intended having a walk round, as a concluding performance, on the following day, but a nasty drizzling rain interfered with our arrangements, and I had only *one* day at the rabbits.

Nevertheless, it was capital fun, and an occasional treat of that sort is not a thing to be sneezed at; and if any of my readers should perchance be bothered by the vermin, let them drop a note to "Wildfowler," care of Editor of *Bell's Life*, and the said "Wildfowler" will soon put matters to rights, with the utmost satisfaction.

Mind, I do not want the rabbits. I will kill them for you, and oh, *rara avis!* I will be thankful for the job, for rabbit-shooting is a bit of fun I very greatly enjoy.

My trip to Derbyshire exhilarated my spirits wonderfully, and I came back to town in a far livelier mood than when I had started.

In fact, for any ill, mental or otherwise, give me shooting as a cure; and whether it be the lordly pheasant or the plebeian rabbit

that comes to my gun, it does not matter one whit, provided I kill something, that is the main point, and then, I am happy. Most shooters who read this will say amen to that, I know, for all shooters are cast in the same mould, and they are never so pleased as when they can conjugate the verb "to kill" in all its sundry moods and tenses. Hark at half-a-dozen shooters talking, if you doubt my word, and you will be enlightened. "I kill, I was killing, I killed, I shall kill, I would kill, I might kill," that is what every shooter is always saying; whilst the anti-game-law agitators lift up their hands, and "agitate" themselves, that he *might not* kill—worse luck to the lot!

WILDFOWL-SHOOTING TRIPS.

CHAPTER III.

ALONG THE LINCOLNSHIRE COAST.

THERE are, almost every week, some inquiries made in every sporting newspaper's columns and at every sporting newspaper's office, respecting suitable quarters, where a man, fond of the gun, can indulge himself to his heart's content, more particularly in wildfowl shooting.

Now, it is very awkward for a man who is privately unacquainted with the favourite places of resort for wildfowl, to pick out a suitable place, without submitting himself to a deal of trouble, and, oftentimes, then find that there was, after all, but meagre sport, and highly unsuitable accommodation, at the place he had chosen. A man who is looking out for a wildfowl marsh requires, not only a fair stock of birds to shoot at when such are to be found, but he also must ascertain beforehand whether any place of refuge be near at hand, and what he can expect there in the way of bodily comforts. It is no joke to be caught in the midst of a marsh, before one has time to beat a retreat and seek a shelter, to find oneself drenched and benumbed, without any likelihood of being able to change one's clothes, and make oneself comfortable, but after a long and wearisome tramp, or a still more awkward drive, to the nearest village or town, which is perhaps miles away. Therefore, what is needed for the sportsman is *bonâ-fide* intelligence concerning certain spots, the amount of sport he may fairly expect to meet with thereat, what sort of ground and contingencies he will have to provide against, and, finally (last but not least), what personal accommodation he will find at or near the spot. As regards a description of the sport and of the nature of the ground, the task is easy enough ; but as concerns visitors'

personal comforts, tastes and purses are so different, that a description of the accommodation and its probable cost cannot but prove acceptable.

Well, I undertook, beginning in November 1874, barring accidents, and other things permitting, to visit weekly some favourite haunts of wildfowl, and to relate my actual experiences thereof.

What I will state, therefore, in this, and the following narratives of "picked" trips, the reader may accept as actual facts and state of things when I visited the sundry places, and he may rely on my statements as he would rely on the evidence of his own senses.

The first spot I had selected for trial and inspection was the Lincolnshire coast, along the Boston Deeps.

From time out of mind, Lincolnshire has been celebrated for its wildfowl-shooting. Before, however, the sea-wall was erected to prevent the sea from encroaching over the land as it did before, all the farms and homesteads one may see now, near the sea, were not only far from being erected, but their eventual erection itself had never been thought of. All the land which has been reclaimed was then but a vast marsh, profusely intersected by gullies and streams, which made it an almost impregnable and unassailable stronghold for wildfowl. Now, almost all the reclaimable land has been duly reclaimed, and justly so. Wheat must take precedence of pleasure; and though, as a sportsman, I have some faint wish that things were still as they were, as a member of the community I must readily acknowledge that all is now for the best, and as it ought to be. Although the work of drainage has been skilfully planned, and energetically carried out, there are still (fortunately for the lovers of the trigger) some lowlands that will probably, till the end of time, remain marshy. Some of these lands, in the hands of their owners, who chanced to be sportsmen, have been turned into decoys; others are merely walked over; but most are duly provided in winter-time with the long wildfowl nettings, stretched about, and facing the road of flight. Of these private marshes I need not say much, because, though the best perhaps in the kingdom, for those shooters who like beating for snipe, or stalking or flighting ducks, yet the fact of their being in private hands renders any lengthy description of them uninteresting and unnecessary, since the general sporting public, to whom they are inaccessible, cannot avail themselves of their advantages. I will, therefore, enter at once into a description of the available wildfowling ground, where any sportsman may roam or watch at will, and as long as he likes, without anyone having to interfere with him, or even question his right of presence.

Well, then, all along the coast, from Boston northward, are marshes which, at low tide, in some places, are some mile and a half wide, and whose ground is so very full of worms, that even in the mildest of weathers, and, therefore most unsuitable time for wildfowling operations, there are always immense flocks of birds to be seen feeding either in the marsh, in its creeks, or on the sands, when the tide is low. The marsh is covered with rough grass, reeds, bent grass, &c., and is profusely cut about by creeks, gullies, ditches, holes, &c., and the mud-banks when the tide recedes, afford always plenty of fun. I need not say that the ground is tremendously slippery, as usual under such circumstances, but if one slip into a hole, he will get an unpleasant, but not a dangerous ducking. Salt water usually does not give colds, and the holes are not deep enough for a man to get drowned in them, except at high-tide; but then the ground is soon thoroughly known, and I need not add that this knowledge is the great advantage *par excellence* in wildfowling matters. Now, to resume my narrative, the air along the Boston Deeps is very keen, and has a reputation perfectly unrivalled for healthiness; so much so, that invalids regularly frequent the shore, and some actually live in the villages. There is a place called Frieston (where, in years gone by, I have shot a great deal), which is now provided with an inn or hotel where one can make himself thoroughly comfortable, and where some invalids regularly take up their quarters for the winter. This Frieston is about the best and most comfortable head-quarters for fair wildfowl-shooting on the Lincolnshire coast, and to it straight would I have gone, as I used to formerly, had I not had still better accommodation offered me by a friend, who has taken up his quarters for the last twenty-three years near Boston.

To those of my readers who have no acquaintances in the town, and who would like to enjoy themselves and be comfortable, I will unhesitatingly say, write to Joseph Sewell at Frieston, and ask him what birds are to be seen? or better still, write and ask him to drop you a note when the birds turn up in flocks. He is a most obliging landlord, and a trustworthy man; he will take care to let you hear from him in time. As Frieston is some five odd miles from Boston, the intending visitor will do well to write in time, before taking his departure, when the landlord of the inn will meet him at the station with his trap, and drive him straight, with arms and baggage, to the village. The roads are fine, the country interesting, the charges at the inn are most moderate, the cleanliness perfectly astounding, the cooking fair, the wines and cigars excellent, and the beds wonderfully comfortable. Moreover, you can do at that inn just as if you were at

home; go in and out with your dog, and please yourself in every way. That is a very good point, is it not? None of your stuck-up tom-fools of waiters there; the landlady and some neat girls under her supervision do the attendance, and you can have all you wish for at a positively low price.

Now, do not let me be misunderstood. Joseph Sewell's place is not to be compared to "The Langham," as regards carpeting, size of rooms, lofty stairs, white-tied waiters, &c., but for wholesome, plain, good food, capital drinks, and sound beds, it is *the* place *par excellence* for shooting. In one word, there is no flash about it; it is a plain, honest English inn, of a good order, and may you, reader, never get under a worse roof!

Well, I had intended, as I have stated before, to patronise Sewell once more, but a series of circumstances prevented us from so doing, though we shot up to a couple of miles from his house, and were in sight of it, but we were so tired then that we had not the courage to cross the marsh and go to the inn to see its owner; and it turned out that it was quite as well we had not taken the trouble, for he, we heard afterwards, had driven to Boston, to the fun of the day, and, in fact, we saw him there in the course of the afternoon.

But, to begin at the beginning, I started from King's Cross by the 5.30 P.M. train, and within three hours, I reached Boston, safe and sound, in company with three more shooters, one of whom we heard, forthwith, inquiring from a porter about Frieston, and how to get there. My friend, who was waiting for me at the station, thereupon said to me:

"This decides the question; we won't go to Frieston to-morrow."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because there was already a sportsman at Sewell's, and now here is another going; we will go higher up the coast. There is a village, a few miles north, where the sport is just as good. It is all the same stretch of marsh, as you know, for you shot there before."

"Well, and now about sport: are there any birds about?"

"Not many, the weather has been too mild; but I daresay we will still find some fun."

Just then, the boom of big guns, the reports of rockets, and the explosion of fireworks struck upon my astonished ears.

"Holloa!" I said, "what is up now?"

"Why, the elections, to be sure! we have been having a pretty to-do here, and will have still more to-morrow, but you will see."

We reached my friend's house by that time, and, over a glass

of grog, after supper, we discussed the plan of battle for the morrow.

"We will drive to the point I have made a note of," said my companion, "and we will shoot there from daylight till twelve. The tide will be up at half-past seven or thereabouts, and I want us to be at the point just an hour before high-tide, so that we may take full advantage of the passage of the birds along the bank. I suppose by nine o'clock the tide will have receded too far for any further bank-shooting, so we will then strike into the marsh, and see what we can pick up there. We will beat the creeks well, and scour the mud-banks till midday, when we will drive back here; for I want you to see the fun in the town, and, to tell the truth, I want to see it myself."

This being agreed to, we retired to bed, where, in spite of the crackers and other noisy signs of popular effervescence, I soon fell asleep.

At 5 A.M. we were up and breakfasting; at six we got into the trap, and at half-past six we were at the trysting-place. Before even reaching it, as the road winds at no great distance from the sea-shore, we could hear a lot of curlews whistling, high in the air, or far away in the marsh.

Well, we took our guns out, shouldered our respective bags, and went down to take up our position; whilst the man drove back the trap, with orders to be back at twelve, sharp.

How lonely all seemed around us! It was still rather dark, though there was a faint streak of pink in the east. There were no houses near, except perhaps a homestead or two, some mile or two away, amidst the meadows behind us; in front of us was the marsh, and the tide, rising rapidly, was already covering it, up to within a hundred yards of the bank. The wind had risen considerably, and blew seaward very hard. Hard lines that, as we had brought no dog with us, because none of our own would suit us for that sport. However, we managed pretty well, notwithstanding.

We began well, at a quarter to seven. I had been watching some birds in a flock, tumbling about in our rear, over the cultivated lands.

"I believe these are lapwings," I said.

It was so dark yet that we could not very well make them out, but as they evidently were coming nearer still, and the strong wind induced them to favour us, we thought they might eventually come near enough for a shot, so we scrambled over the sea-wall, and laid ourselves in ambush on the other side. Whilst, however, watching the peewits, I heard the whistling of some sandpipers;

I turned round, and a flock passing at a goodish range, I floored three, and they fell into the sea. I thought they would be lost, the wind being so strong from land, and had made up my mind to see them blown out into the German Ocean, but, to my great astonishment, they drifted on a creek side, and the rising tide eventually brought them slowly ashore.

Our peewits had disappeared. In their stead a lot of geese and gulls turned up, and of the former we counted no less than two hundred in a long V-shaped flock. They, however, passed wide and very high.

The light of day had now increased. It was a quarter-past seven; the tide had come slowly up to within thirty or forty yards of the bank, and now the fun began. Flocks after flocks of starlings and of pipers filed past us with astonishing speed, reminding one of a partridge drive, but the birds being smaller and immensely swifter, the fun to knock them over was very great, and consequently all the more interesting. They were all travelling in the same direction, so that we had only one side to watch, and we soon had a perfect heap of slain, though we lost about a dozen that fell too far out for us to wade to them.

I was just wading up to a large piper, when some gray plovers swept over me. They were right above my head when I fired, and as my companion, from his place, had at the same time popped at them too, they fell down like hail, on and around me, and we had a good two or three minutes' splashing before we had retrieved them all.

A word here about the splashing business. For any comparatively standing work, like the above, I certainly should recommend high boots, thoroughly water-tight, for the following reason—viz. that, if you wear ordinary boots, as you do not move much about, when you get your feet wet, you are not only liable to feel very cold, in spite of your enthusiasm, but you speedily get disgusted with the fun, because nothing makes a man feel so miserable as standing still in wet socks. He cannot help wishing he were back home. The best long boots are those that lace up in front, because they hold on your feet just like ordinary boots, and do not offer to remain sticking in the mud when you want to move, as ordinary long boots are much wont to do. Dean's high "Field" boots are superb for that sort of work. When, however, you undertake beating a marsh, long boots, whether with the insteps laced up or not, are a nuisance, because they tire you so quickly. True, they keep your feet dry, so long as you don't get water into them over the tops, but this latter part of the programme, somehow, frequently happens. when such boots are used,

partly, I fancy, because wearing them inspires one, at the time, with such confidence, and induces such recklessness in one's walking, that, eventually, one is sure to slide down and pop into a hole just deep enough to get the water over the side, and fill at least one boot, if not both. I know what it is—I have experienced it so many times. I therefore think that, all considered, as one is so liable to get wet anyhow, it is better to make up one's mind to get so, and go rambling about the marsh with ordinary shooting boots on. With the ordinary precaution of changing one's socks when the beating is over, one is about safe from any uncomfortable feeling; and, on the other hand, the wearing of small boots during the long tramp gives a freedom of action which long heavy boots go a long way towards impeding. I certainly prefer, myself, when I have to do some walking, having wet feet and being able to walk briskly, to jump easily, and to run when necessary, to having dry feet and not be able to reach my birds, without mentioning the dreadful fatigue of wearing long boots for any length of time, whilst arduously tramping up and down creeks and mud-banks.

Well, at about eight o'clock the tide turned, and soon, near bank, little patches of green began to appear once more, as the sea receded. These little islands were extensively patronised by the birds, and we shot several kinds of the sandpiping tribe, without any fuss and trouble. We had merely to watch for the flocks, mark them down as they settled on those little bits of green sward, run down the embankment, course down by its side, until we were opposite the place where the birds had settled, climb up again, and popping suddenly above, pepper the birds with a rattling right and left that swept the grass from under their feet. Then, as soon as the water began to go down, it did so at an astonishing rate, so much so, that, within an hour and a half, about half a mile of marsh was already bare and fit to be walked over.

And, by-the-way, the ground there is perfectly sound. Go where you like, and tread where you will, even when crossing the creeks, which crop up there every ten or twenty yards, you never go down any depth in the mud.

On the other hand, this long marsh has a defect, against which a sportsman ought to be careful in guarding himself. I allude to the insecurity of remaining on the marsh, or on the sands beyond, when the tide begins to rise; for, as I have already explained, the ground is so very flat, and almost so level with the sea, that when once the flow begins, it overhauls rapidly the gunning rambler, and shuts off all his means of escape, by filling

up first all the creeks that cut about the ground, so that he finds himself entangled in a perfect maze of creeks now full of water, and therefore past all ordinary wading. There is then no time to be lost, for every moment of delay may cost the sportsman his life. You must resolutely make up your mind, and strike a path, direct for the sea-wall, with all possible speed, and with the firm determination to wade, jump, or somehow cross every intervening watery obstacle, without any idle thought or reflection as to the depth or breadth thereof. Even then, if you were far away from the bank, it would be, probably, a hard tussle ; but life is a prize worth wrestling for, and the resolute man will escape.

However, an ounce of prevention being worth a thousand tons of cure, let the sportsman, however intent he may be on his sport, keep a strict look-out for any such contingency.

First of all, I am a great believer in a little thoughtful reflection before embarking into any undertaking, and as regards the shore shooting now under consideration, whenever I go in for anything of that sort, I always ascertain at what time the tide is to be high (if it is coming up), or at what time it was high (if the tide is going down). Then I look at my watch, and calculate how many hours I have to enjoy myself on the marsh, in peace, and free from interruption.

Now, on the day of the adventures I am now relating, the morning tide was up at 7.30 A.M. At half-past nine the marsh was nearly cleared, and the sands appearing ; therefore, had we been so disposed, or inclined, we could have shot over the marsh, as much as we pleased, up to 5 P.M., at least, without fear of being interrupted by the tide. Without this little bit of reasoning, and a watch, one is very often bothered by the thought of any lurking danger, and it mars one's pleasure.

Well, my friend knew the ground as well as I did, and better, and we had thorough good fun. Up to ten, or half-past, however, though we had our bags, large ones, more than half full of birds, yet, strange to say, we had no large birds as yet amongst the number. The fact is, the weather was too mild, more like a summer's day than a day in November, so that the birds were not only few, comparatively speaking, but also very wary, having as yet experienced no hardships.

We, nevertheless, afterwards, tried to stalk several large flocks of sea-pies and curlews. I wounded one of the latter, but he picked himself up, crowded all sail, put on all steam, and resolutely embarked himself over the sea with such an evident determination to make the best of his time, that if he is still

flying, he ought to have gone round the globe many times, by this time.

As the sea went still farther down, the stretch-nets began to appear more plainly, and, in one case, one performed very ludicrously.

My friend had posted himself in a creek right behind a longish net, or rather a stretch of three or four, and about a hundred yards from it, whilst I went a long way round, to drive him a flock of curlews, half curlews, and oyster-birds, which were on the feed higher up. As I began turning towards the birds, I looked for my friend, but could not see him. I stopped and looked hard, and then I saw him popping his head quietly above a tuft of rank grass that grew on the bank of the creek where he was concealed.

"Oh!" I thought, "he is well hidden there, for, if I can't see him, knowing the spot, it is ten to one some of the birds will run into his shot. So here goes!" and I went towards the birds.

It had been agreed that I should not fire unless positively getting a fair shot, and I was not in the humour of trying a random shot, for I well knew that whenever a shot is fired at them, these birds invariably sheer off to sea, whereas, if simply frightened away by the sight of any intruder, they sail away contentedly over the marsh, and that was just what I wanted them to do. So I went on, quietly enough, and, according to the well-known ideas of curlews as to the proper distances to be kept between their precious selves and anything that looks like a gun, they startled before I was within a hundred yards of them, and they rose, scornfully whistling their quaint note. As chance would have it, they went straight for my friend; but he showed himself too soon and spoilt his chance. He only bagged one with his two barrels, and I heard some few pellets of his large shot falling from the skies around me, though I was pretty nearly then two hundred yards from him; but the strong wind blew them towards me, I presume.

On the report of the gun, a flock of pipers came past me like a whirlwind; I downcharged at their approach, and duly saluted them with two cartridges of No. 5 shot, but I killed only one. Part of the rest, however, flew right into the net, and the others over, and at the side. Only two were momentarily caught. They had, somehow, hit the twine, and it had flung them back, the meshes being too large to hang them. The shock, however, was sufficient to stun them awhile, and it was rather a study to see my friend race for them; and then, when he got near, they

deliberately collected their wits, walked a little way, and then flew away as if nothing had happened, from almost under the feet of my companion. He, as in duty bound, shouldered his gun, but click! click! He had forgotten, in the hurry of picking up his curlew, to take off his empty cartridges and reload. That was a shave for the pipers any way, and no mistake. And I sincerely trust they will remember it, and warn their companions of the seashore of the treacherous hang-nets that are hung there.

These nets catch enormous quantities of birds, when the weather is fit, and I wonder such things are allowed at all. It strikes me that it is a funny thing to make any man pay ten shillings to the treasury if the said man wishes to shoot sparrows with his gun, and then a lot of fellows are allowed to hang nets as thickly as they like, and catch therewith, and very often in one single catch, what a gunner would not shoot in the whole season, plodding day after day.

By-the-way, I saw a very splendid silk net stretched there; it was rather smaller meshed than the others, and it looked uncommonly like a partridge net. I daresay it had seen plenty of hard work by night in the fields, at the beginning of the season, and was then put to catch wildfowl, as a *pis-aller*, I suppose.

Well, unperceived by us, time had flown on, and it needed the sight of my friend's man on the bank to bring us to our senses. Already twelve o'clock! How quickly time had passed by!

We made tracks for home. Of the fun in the town it is not here the place to speak, and barring that a cracker nearly sent the mare into the river, we had fortunately no accident.

Early on the following day we went on another point of the marsh, this time nearer Boston, and we had again an entertaining day's sport.

We were more fortunate in getting large birds, owing to a fluke by which our four barrels, into a flock of curlews, floored no less than five of them, and subsequently we bagged three lapwings whilst walking along the bank. We then separated to try our individual luck; but, as I said before, the weather, as yet, was not what it ought to have been for wildfowling.

The landlord of the Frieston Inn, when I had met him the previous day, had told me that there was not much doing either, near his place, though some geese and lots of ducks had been seen about, and that seemed to imply hard weather at hand. Whenever such turns out to be the case, I would say to one and each of my brother sportsmen in search of a wildfowling station: "Pack up your guns, go to Joseph Sewell's, and you will have no cause to repent." All sorts of birds are to be killed there.

Not very far from Frieston are three brothers, all puntmen, who, to a great extent, make their living from the fowl they kill in winter time, and that is a pretty fair criterion of the quality of the marsh as a fowling spot.

And now I must take my leave of the Lincolnshire coast, with a few statistics as regards Frieston. Three hours' rail (fares 19*s.*, 14*s.* 6*d.*, and 8*s.* 11*d.*, first, second, and third class respectively), and half-an-hour's drive, will take a visitor from London (King's Cross) to the inn. The expenses when there, if one confines himself to necessaries, come to a very moderate sum. The house is within twenty yards of the sea at spring-tide, and a more wild-fowly point of view it would be hard to find, than the prospect from those windows of the inn that overlook the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE RIVER ORWELL.

EVERY favourite place of resort for wildfowl has a peculiarity of its own. The Orwell has one, and a stunning one, viz. it is one of the most dangerous places to shoot over, that is, when one means tramping over the flats. Therefore, the only way to do the river thorough justice, is to beat it about in a boat; for, even supposing that a man could possibly stalk over its tidal marsh, the creeks are so deep, so frequent, and so treacherous withal, that it would be a herculean task, and a very unsatisfactory one.

Of course, mud-shoes are there a *sine quâ non*, and anyone who has tried such knows that it is not pleasant to walk about with them for any length of time. I am very fond of wildfowling, but I hate treacherous ground, and consequently I eschew walking there, when this can possibly be avoided.

Well, I arrived at Harwich for my trip, at an unearthly hour, somewhere near midnight. The weather was very rough, and it was raining cats and dogs. Howbeit, I put on a cheerful countenance when I met old Joe, who was waiting for me at the station, though I had not told him to do so when I had written to him to tell him that I was coming, that I intended having a shy at the birds, and that he was to get his boat ready for me.

"Well, Joe," I said, as I handed him my bag of cartridges, "what news?"

"Plenty of birds, sir," he said with a deep, cavernous chuckle; "but," he added, checking his mirth, suddenly, "they are blessed wild, as yet, sir."

When we got to the hotel I had some supper, and whilst Joe discussed a glass or two of grog, he related to me the news, and such was very cheering. At half-past twelve, I was in bed, and, very soon after, too soon to my thinking, I was awakened, according to arrangement, by Joe, who shook me in my bed, and said it

was 5 A.M., and time to start! I never knew time to go so fast before. The weather was very blustering, the sky cloudless, and the wind piercingly cold. How uninviting looked the sea when we reached the stairs, below which was the boat bobbing up and down on the angry waves!

"Joe," I said, "if it is as rough on the river as it is here, by Jove! precious few birds will I be able to bag."

"Oh! it will be smoother higher up, I daresay."

And off we went, all by ourselves. We passed the man-of-war lying there at anchor, opposite the Marine Hotel, and soon turned the point, after crossing the mouth of the river Stour, which there joins the Orwell. Joe said the Stour was as good as the Orwell, but I had made up my mind to go up the latter, even to Ipswich.

The tide was going down, and was about half spent, so that a good deal of the flats had appeared already. It was still dark, but the light of day increased very rapidly. A lot of big seagulls were already scouring the harbour, but to those I paid no attention. I was seated in the bows, as usual, with my bag of cartridges opened in front of me, and the gun across my knees, loaded and ready. I was looking *de tous mes yeux*, trying to pierce the darkness that hid, as yet, almost everything but mud, sea, and sky, when, suddenly, something like a lump of mud, about fifty yards away, happened to move before a little pool of water, which, being bright, placed it in relief, so to speak. As lumps of mud are not in the habit of perambulating the marsh, I instantly covered it, and pressed the trigger, making Joe jump on his seat. As nothing had stirred after the explosion, I deduced therefrom that the something that had previously moved was done for, and said so to Joe, who instantly pulled for it.

When the boat touched the bank, the worthy boatman rigged on his mud-pattens, and landed with an oar to steady himself with.

"I can't see anything," he called out, after some search.

Now, anyone who has been in such places knows how difficult it is to hit on the exact spot where one has fired, even when it is daylight, so, how much more difficult must it be, when it is dark? Well, Joe went on, up and down, splashing away, and he was going to give up the search in despair, and I was, indeed, myself beginning to think that I had shot at a shadow, when Joe stumbled, slid into a hole, and in rising, he placed his hand on the bird.

"I have got it," he said; and he held it up towards the sky, when a long bill appeared prominently.

"A curlew! by all that is good!"

And he came back very contentedly, notwithstanding his fall. Well, that was a good beginning, anyhow, and he went ahead with great spirit.

"Look out, sir," said Joe presently, in a whisper, and stopping rowing.

I turned round quickly. Against the clear sky, at some distance yet from us, was a bird that appeared to me immense, slowly flying towards us.

"What is it?" I said, in a low key.

"*An 'ern!* sir," retorted Joe, crouching down, at full length, at the bottom of our craft, whilst I kept as quiet as possible, with my finger on the trigger and quite ready.

"A *what?*" I asked, puzzled.

"An 'ern!"

What the deuce could it be? Oh! I had it; he meant a heron.

The splendid bird came on, but rose when he saw us, and, although I peppered him to the best of my ability, he did not seem to notice much the aggression, and soon disappeared behind us in the gloom.

Many flocks of sandpipers passed then over and around us, but they flew so quickly that I could not detect their exact whereabouts, and when, by-and-by, I heard the pretty tinkling noise, like that of tiny bells, made by some redshanks, I wished heartily for daylight to appear. Some time elapsed without sport of any kind, and it was rather tedious to sit in the boat doing nothing. We were soon enabled, however, to see our whereabouts more clearly, and that never fails to enliven me.

And when the sun rose, what a glorious sight met my wondering eyes! Over a flat, about two hundred yards wide, were about twenty herons, gravely stalking and picking up worms; about a hundred curlews were running across the flat; and, certainly, hundreds of smaller birds enlivened the scene with their wild notes. Somehow there is something in the sight of a marsh thus thickly tenanted, and made interesting by the different cries and calls of the birds, which one does not find in the thickest grouse drive, or on the most profusely stocked of partridge grounds.

Now that the birds were there (and, by-the-way, I think such an abundance of wildfowl has not been witnessed for some time, and I attribute it, in all justice, to the passing of the Act for the protection of wild birds), the question was, how to bag some. We held a council of war. Joe, as the elder, spoke first, and as his arguments carried both weight and experience with them, we acted up to them.

"There is a large creek lower down," said the worthy old man,

"where I will take you. The tide is still receding, and will continue to do so for another hour and a half, or so, therefore you need not be under any fear on that account. I will land you there, with the mud-shoes, and one of the boards that I have got here on purpose, so that you can be, on it, comfortable like. Of course, being under the wind, the birds will not scent you, and if you do not show yourself they will keep quietly feeding. Then I will row up to the next creek, and when about halfway in it I will stand up in the boat and scare the birds. Out of the lot some are sure to pass over the place where you will be in ambush."

"That is a good plan," I said; "pull away!"

And soon we reached the creek. It was nearly empty, and we rigged quickly my standing-post that was to be. The board, a triangular one, about a yard square, was first adjusted, and I landed on it, and sat thereon, there to wait until I should hear the old man's voice.

"All right?" he asked me.

"All right," I said.

And away he went.

When he had disappeared I reflected on my position. Alone there, in that wild spot, and encompassed on all sides by water, or impassable soft mud creeks, what would become of me if an accident should befall the old boatman? He might fall overboard and get drowned. In such an occurrence, my own fate would have been clear, for I was past all human help, even if such had been at hand, which was far from being the case, for I believe there was no house nearer to me than a couple of miles, and its inhabitants could not have reached me, even if they had been aware of my position and had attempted my rescue. At the same time, as there were but few probabilities that the old boy would thus, for the occasion, pitch himself overboard, I turned my thoughts towards the fowl, which I could hear two hundred yards from me, whistling, calling, disputing, and fighting. I had a good mind to climb up the bank, but it was so slimy that a look was enough to convince me of the futility of the attempt.

Whilst thus revolving the case in my own mind, about a dozen redshanks dashed over my head. I shouldered my gun, but bethought myself, just in time, that it would be better not to fire, because, if I did, all Joe's exertions would be rendered fruitless; accordingly I refrained. Besides, redshanks are all very well in their way, but when one has the choice between *'erns*, curlew, oyster-catchers, a bittern or two, and a multitude of other marsh and sea birds, redshanks appear very low indeed, in one's estimation.

I therefore disdainfully let these go, and resigned myself to wait patiently.

Patiently, forsooth! But it struck me suddenly that I had been waiting already a precious long while, and I began to wonder what the deuce could detain the old man. Had he stuck in the mud, or what had happened?

Ha! I hear his voice shouting. I start up, and watch intently the top of the bank. Whist! comes a flock of sandpipers, then another, then, eighty yards below, on the left, a flock of curlews file away, and I look at them wistfully. A great bird appears on my right, I turn round hastily whilst shouldering the gun, and, though aware that I am slipping down, I fire, miss, go down up to my knees in mud, fire again, miss again, and then I reclimb on my board, with my legs and hands in an awful mess.

Of course, no other birds came my way after that.

And that was how it came to pass that I despised firing at redshanks to bag—nothing.

Ten minutes after, I heard the splashing of the oars, and soon I spied the boat rounding the creek; in another minute I was on board, very disgusted with myself, and, whilst Joe mopped my boots, I related to him all that had happened.

"There is an old saying, sir," he went on, giving, for each word, an extra twist to his mop, "that a bird in the hand is worth——"

"I know," I interrupted, "twenty in the marsh. But, at the same time, had I fired at those redshanks, even if I had killed some of them, I should have thought that I had spoiled my chance at the larger birds; and so, all is for the best after all."

When I was thoroughly mopped *aet*, we left the creek, and I resumed my place in the bows.

On the opposite shore were some birds, among which stood a large one, presumably an *'ern*, and towards these we directed our skiff. I lay down forward, letting nothing of my person be visible to the birds, and thus we progressed.

When we were alongside the flat, Joe pulled vigorously and noiselessly, and I peeped out. The heron, evidently 'smelling a rat,' thought he had better stop his interesting chase after worms, and see what we were up to. When yet about seventy yards from him he thought a change of air, and, perchance, of diet also, would do him good, so he took three or four rapid steps in order to have a good start, jumped off, and opened his wings, when bang! he shut them again, touched ground, but springing up once more, slowly sailed away, saluted by another shot.

"Them birds," said Joe, "is confoundedly tough."

"I wish you would learn better grammar," I said.

"Sorry I spoke," he retorted amiably, and then we both laughed.

Higher up the river, three curlews were feeding at no very great distance from the water. We went towards them, but before we were within even rifle range they were off. Presently we saw a flock of half-a-dozen ducks going across the river, and thereupon Joe suggested that I should just land and go to a pool situated behind the bank.

"Nobody shoots there," he said; "I will be bound to say there may be a duck or two in it."

Now, though I don't care much for walking over the mud, yet when it is a necessity for sport, I don't think about it at all. Accordingly, I rigged on the old man's pattens, and when we reached the flat I landed, and, treading rather gingerly and cautiously, I made my way to the bank. When there, I took off the mud-shoes and went down on the other side. The pool was close by, and was partly surrounded by dried-up reeds and sedges. I approached it with the stealth of a wild Indian on the war-path.

Tchick! Tchick! A snipe! Bang! Down he comes, and up goes a teal. Bang! Flop! goes the teal, back again, all in a lump, on the water. I reload quickly, for there is no knowing what may be found where one has sprung a snipe, and as I go to pick up my birds a jack-snipe rises behind me noiselessly, and when I see it, it is too late to fire, the bird being at least eighty yards away. After that, I re-embarked.

We were then about five or six miles from Harwich, and opposite a village whose name I don't recollect, but there is a *hard* there, and as Joe hinted that at the end of that hard was a public-house, where some fair beer was to be got, and he should not mind a pint, we landed, and he had his pint. It was midday when we resumed work, the tide had come up, and nearly all the flats were covered over by the brine; the consequence of that state of the marsh was, that we were kept too far away from those remaining portions of the flats that were still visible, on account of the shallows. There were still plenty of birds to be seen, but they were safe enough from any interruption, and they seemed to know it perfectly well.

I had never as yet seen so many herons together as I saw there and then, and as we went up the river I noticed at least two hundred of these birds gravely stalking, flying, and performing all those evolutions peculiar to marsh-fowl.

The way herons land is very pretty. They swoop down near the place they have selected, and when within a foot of the ground

they jerk up their heads and make them form an instantaneous S over their backs, so as to stop the impetus of their flight. At the same time they put their long legs to land, and run two or three yards, pretty much in the style of a horse which has been pulled up, when at speed in trotting, and is gradually stopping his course. I watched these noble birds with great pleasure; but in spite of sundry attempts I was unable to secure one, and that seemed to me very hard, as I had made up my mind to have one.

"Joe," I said, "is there no means of coming up with one of them?"

Joe scratched his ear and said: "No. Leastway," he added, "not now, as the tide prevents us from any attempt; but this evening, if you would like to try, I daresay you would bag one or two."

"I certainly will, then."

And with that, we landed at Ipswich. We had come up about eleven miles, and we wanted refreshments badly, after our exposure to the strong wind for so many hours.

There being nothing satisfactory to be done on the river until the tide had receded again beyond the flats, we did not hurry our departure, and agreed that, in the evening, we would wait in the large creek for one of the herons to come over our heads. Accordingly, after a good meal, we went back leisurely to the boat, and allowed ourselves to drift down the stream. I had a few shots at flocks of ox-birds and sandpipers, and a crack at three red-shanks, two of which I bagged; but I did nothing of note with large birds, they, wisely enough, keeping far out of the range of any gun but a swivel-gun. By-the-bye, there is a man who punts over the river in winter-time, and who sweeps pretty loads of birds, when luck and weather allow him to do so. He is, I understand, master of a yacht which, as in duty bound, he sails for her owner during the fine season; but when once she is laid up for the winter at her moorings he goes into his punt with a swivel-gun carrying half a pound of shot, and several times he has bagged over a score of ducks at one shot. But, as I said before, a man, for that sort of work, requires a thorough knowledge of the river, for if, by chance, the punt should get stranded, of course the puntman most likely cannot extricate it, and must remain where he is until the high-tide lifts it up and floats it once more. That, I need not say, is far from being pleasant, even to a wildfowl shooter, who, mostly will readily put up with anything.

Well, by the time we reached the creek the tide was just beginning to turn. We entered the creek and crept in it quietly, its banks just appearing above water. When halfway in it we

stopped, dropped anchor, and waited. Evening had set in, and had it not been that a brilliant moon began to shed its light over the scene, I don't think I should have stopped there long enough for any sport, for the prospect is somewhat limited when a man is between two mud-banks; but what will not a shooter put up with, in order to shoot? Down went the tide at a good pace, the flats once more reappeared, and the birds came back in perfect droves to their feeding ground. Half-a-dozen flocks of ducks and a bunch of teal passed across the sky, but half a mile up in the clouds. Then curlews began their journeys up and down the river. As for shanks, both red and green, I do not think I have ever seen or heard such numbers as I heard and saw that memorable night. I bagged half-a-dozen birds within a quarter of an hour, then there was a lull, and we began, at least I did, to feel lonely. Still no heron had come. Joe said he would go up the bank, and keep watch, as we could not then any longer peep above it from the boat, the water having dropped so much. So he went; and I then pushed back the boat in mid-creek, and faced the old man.

"I can't see anything," he whispered after a moment's silence.

"Well then, I vote we go home. I am cold, and if there be no shooting it is not worth while freezing here."

"But, sir," he said, "the 'erns are sure to come, you know, and you want one, and, by Jove! here they come, and no mistake!"

And down he slid back, keeping only his eyes above the bank, and, in a stage whisper:

"There are seven of them, and they are coming to you, as straight as can be. Look out! Here they are! Now then!"

And he dropped to the water's edge, remaining motionless. At last there was the chance I had waited for; but what a long time they were in making their appearance! The fact is, they were flying slowly, a few yards only above the marsh, evidently being in search of a suitable feeding or resting place, and they came quite unsuspectingly. But, by Jove! what a sight they are at night. Their wings appear three times their natural size, and their necks are "a caution" as to length.

Well, up they came, slowly, and passed near me within good range. I selected the biggest, banged at him; he dropped, but as I could see he was only wounded, and from experience I knew a wounded heron to be an ugly bird to pick up, I gave him another barrel as he was landing, and that settled him.

Thereupon I took up Joe, we picked up the bird, and, in spite of the old man's entreaties to stop again for another bird, I declined, and struck work. The fact was, I was benumbed.

"If we only waited another hour or so," said Joe, "we would get plenty more birds."

"I have got enough," I said; "but, even if I had not, I could not stand it any longer. You see I am not in a winter's costume for wildfowling, and so I don't feel equal to waiting another hour or two. Therefore, home we go."

When we reached the mouth of the creek there was a barge there, at anchor, and two bargees, as is usual with such customers, began the customary chaff. Said one:

"I say, Bill, what may these two chaps be shootin', think you?"

"Sparrers," answered Bill, with due emphasis and derision.

Thereupon Joe turned round. "If you had that 'ere sparrer's beak into your eye, Bill," he said, "I daresay it would make you wink!"

And he held up the heron for the man's gaze.

Joe scored there evidently, for the bargees dived into their hold, and said no more. I struck a match, looked at my watch. Half-past nine. We at once turned back for Harwich, where we arrived at half-past eleven, very tired but very pleased.

The next day, I went, during the afternoon, on the Harwich river, the Stour, and found there an abundance of large birds, but they were very shy, and I only bagged two. Still, it is a great treat to see such large flocks, even when one does not bag much, and to any of my readers in search of a suitable river for wildfowling, I emphatically recommend a stay at Harwich, in due season, and a series of expeditions up the rivers. They cannot fail to be highly pleased with the sport, and, of course, the harder the weather, the more fun to be had. There are frequent trains from London to Harwich, and the journey occupies but three hours. At Harwich there is plenty of accommodation at all prices, and to suit all purses; so to those wildfowlers who delight in shooting from a boat I will say try the Orwell, and if they don't see there countless birds, "I will eat my hat!"

CHAPTER V.

THE THAMES AND THE MEDWAY.

It is strange, but true, that a man looks far and wide sometimes for a thing which, after all, may turn out to be at his own door. This was the case with a friend of mine who went to Ireland last winter, for a wildfowl-shooting trip, shot nothing worth speaking of there, and on his return to London met with some sport with me down the river Thames and up the Medway.

It seems that my friend Tom, who possesses, amongst other instruments of warfare, a very large-bore single gun, carrying, I believe, 4 oz. of shot, chanced to have been directed to a spot on the Irish coast, where the fowl certainly were very abundant, but where also, on his arrival, he found the nearest quarters thoroughly tenanted by a squad of jealous shooters, and some of these had actually rigged out punt guns, so that even the 4-oz. instrument, for once, had to get in the shade.

The sport was very lively, inasmuch as two or three punts regularly worked up to the same flocks repeatedly, and thus the guns purposely marred each other's enjoyment. This is a very foolish way of doing things, and a most ungentlemanly and unsportsmanlike style withal; for, besides engendering a bitter feeling between the rival parties, and fostering a spirit of reckless emulation, which is far from conducive to success, it also sets a very bad example to the professionals, and goodness only knows that the latter are but too ready to offer up the amateurs' failings as an excuse for their own shortcomings.

In fact, how can one expect that an uneducated man who sees his betters acting unfairly, will be led into the right path himself, by any amount of reasoning?

To sum up the whole matter, according to my friend's evidence, the flocks which ought to have yielded a fair bag each morning and evening, to both puntsmen and shore gunners,

were broken into, scared, and driven away by a reckless cannonade and fusillade from three or four rival punts that went out on purpose to prevent each other's working up from succeeding satisfactorily; so my friend came back highly dissatisfied with his trip, and whenever the subject is mentioned he heaps maledictions innumerable on the heads of the disturbers of the peace.

This is not the first time that such events have come to my knowledge. I saw, once, two professionals coming to blows, and hammering away at each other with their paddles from their respective punts, to the imminent danger of a capsize. And another time, if rumour spoke truly, a puntsman deliberately fired his swivel-gun into a rival punt, and then excused himself on the ground that he had taken the punt in the twilight for a bunch of teal!

To return to my present subject, my friend was very riled, and I was advising him to try some of the spots where I had been lately, such as on the shore near Boston, or on the rivers Orwell and Stour.

"You cannot fail to enjoy yourself," I said. "Of course you have read the narratives in *Bell's Life* of my two excursions, so on the point of fun you know what to expect. In fact, as it is now, by far, colder than it was when I shot over the places, I am certain that the fowl to be found there must have multiplied tenfold."

His next question settled the discussion. "Where do you intend going yourself?" said he.

"On the Thames and on the Medway," I replied; "I have been there repeatedly in years gone by, and always gleaned something worth bagging. I have shot along every creek, bend, nook, and corner, from Woolwich to Southend, and farther, and I know my way about, thoroughly. I used to keep a little yacht on purpose for that sort of fun; and I warrant you I used my boat right to the purpose, for I was in her for weeks together, when the weather suited, and I could spare the time. Well, you know Charlie? I have arranged with him about the trip. If you come with me next Monday, down to Woolwich, he will be there with his ten-tonner, and we will all make the trip together." On the day fixed, by about noon, we got aboard, safe and snug, but we found that another gunner was also expected, and so the boat had to remain at anchor until 4 P.M., when our missing friend turned up.

Meanwhile, Tom and I had not remained idle, for, with an understanding that we should be picked up by Charlie on his

way down the river, we hired a boat and two boatmen, and went for a trip on our own hook. As I knew of old, that, for some distance on the Kent shore, there are lots of gunpowder magazines, near which, of course, one cannot shoot, I directed our men to pull for the Essex shore, and Tom, with his 4-ouncer, in the stern-sheets, and I, with my double 10-bore, in the bow, kept a pretty sharp look-out as we went along, and dreadfully cold work it was.

The first shot was at a very large gull, which Tom brought down at a range of eighty odd yards, or so. But then, what will not four ounces of shot do, when a sufficient quantity of powder is placed behind it, and propels it well? The bother with that large gun was that it kicked up a terrible row when it went off, and its puff of smoke was of itself a small cloud.

Well, after some little chaff on the subject, we went on, for we had had to stop whilst Tom was reloading the muzzle-loading *fusil de rampart*. By-and-by we passed a large coal-wharf, where two screw colliers were unloading, and at some little distance from it we came to an abandoned pile enclosure, projecting into the river. This enclosure was, I believe, originally built in order to mark the foundation of a dock, but after some thousands of pounds had been freely spent, firstly, in selecting the spot; secondly, in drawing the plans; and thirdly, in driving in the piles, for some reason or other the spot was found to be unsuitable, and had to be abandoned. The whole affair is now deserted, and that portion of shore and water which is enclosed by the piles has naturally remained pretty free from intrusion, and, on the shore, tall reeds have grown and have formed a safe refuge for birds. We were drifting along the outside of the wooden piles, when, on the top of one which was just about half a foot above water, I saw something which riveted at once my attention. The boat being then in motion, two or three piles intervened between the something and my sight, but when it turned up again I instantly made it out to be a bird, and judged it, at first sight, to be a diver. As quick as thought I fired at it, and knocked it down from its perch on the top of the waves, where it fluttered helplessly. I redoubled the dose, to make matters safe, and then we looked for an entrance to the enclosure. We rowed to the spot with all speed, looked and looked again, but could not see the bird anywhere.

"Now, where, in the name of all that is good, has it gone to?" I asked.

"The tide has dragged him away through the piles, sir, I fancy," said one of the men, "and we shall lose him, I fear."

Well, we were all standing in the boat, looking for it, when,

lo ! another bird, similar to the first, appeared from among the timber, and flew deliberately across the water. Bang ! and down he came, quite dead. On the report, another one rose, only to share the same fate ; and whilst I was reloading, a third bird flew towards the reeds on our right, and him Tom bundled over, when two more went into the tall rank grass on our left. Whilst I was putting fresh cartridges in my gun, and Tom was loading, the men picked up the two birds that had fallen on our side of the piles, and then they rowed back on the other side for the third one, where it had managed to pitch. The birds proved to be moorhens, and were in the finest condition, and they subsequently proved very excellent eating, for, in the course of the evening, they were cooked on board the yacht, and I partook of one; I therefore can speak, from practical experience, of their gastronomical worth.

Well, we went on, but when we were within half a mile of Erith the thought struck me that as it was then three o'clock, and getting dark, we ran a good chance of not being seen from the yacht if it delayed much more coming down the river, so I opined that we should retrace our way towards Woolwich, and it was just as well we did so, for we fell in with the yacht when it was almost dark, and had we delayed more we should not have seen it.

We clambered on board, and the watermen went their way.

I was very glad to find that the lad had kept a good fire in the cabin, for the afternoon's work had been rather cold. It was bad enough when the sun was up, but the row back, when it was nearly dark, had chilled us to the bone.

"Why," said Charlie, as we went down, "your teeth are actually chattering."

"And so would yours be," said Tom, "if you had been half the day and evening in an open boat, doing nothing, and feeling the night fog insinuating itself up to your skin, through any amount of clothing."

We sat by the red-hot stove, and a glass of warm water, with something in it, soon brought us to our usual degree of warmth and comfort.

"There is a magnificent moonlight now," quoth Charlie, who was at the tiller ; "are any of you intending to shoot to-night ?"

"I do, for one," I said.

"And so do I," said Charlie's guest, a lieutenant on sick-leave.

"Where are we now?" I asked.

"Opposite Erith, near the Essex shore."

"Well, there is nothing to be done here," I remarked ; "let

us have a snack, and when we get down to Greenhithe marshes we will land, and see what we can do."

Now, it is a strange thing that most men, after a meal, don't care about facing the rough weather, on a bare marsh, whereas I would rather start after a substantial foundation than go when half hungry. And so it came to pass that when we reached Greenhithe, I was the only one inclined to go ashore with the gun.

To be candid, I was not displeased with this arrangement, for I have rarely found any companions pleasant company after dark; somehow there is always something happening to such, and they spoil all chances of bagging by their complaints and their floundrings.

The lad brought the dingy round, and we pulled ashore with a will, whilst the yacht's head was turned to the wind and her anchor dropped. The moon was shining so brilliantly that up to fifty yards or more one could distinguish fairly anything worth shooting. I landed, sent back the dingy, and made tracks for the place where the cattle troughs used to be in years gone by. I heard, *chemin faisant*, plenty of birds whistling, but none came my way; but when I got to within a hundred yards of the inundated portions of the marsh, I faintly saw hundreds of birds in flocks, flying over the shallow water, and rummaging on its shores.

There is no shelter of any kind there, except an old gate or two, half broken and pulled down, so I went forward, stooping as best I could, and when within sixty yards I reconnoitred. The best flock of oxbirds was on my right, but about a dozen redshanks were on my left, and I was debating to which of the two I should give the preference in my attentions, when the shanks rising put an end to my irresolution. I fired at them, and sweeping the gun round, I banged also at the rising oxbirds. I picked up a redshank and four oxbirds. There was another bird wounded, but it ran with such speed, with its wings erect over its back, that I very nearly lost sight of it. At last it floundered into a small ditch, and I picked it up. I then went to the shore, where a large flock was whistling, and I succeeding in getting within fifty yards, when I fired both barrels and bagged eight birds. Then back again to the troughs, where the birds had returned, and I shot two more and wounded another.

Whilst going after this one, the startled flocks actually returned, and I was enabled to have another shot. Then the moon got hid behind some clouds; I felt tired, and accordingly struck a path for the shore, where my "Yacht ahoy!" soon brought the dingy to me.

"How many birds have you got?" asked my companions chaffingly, when I reappeared in the cabin. "By Jove! you did fire! and no mistake!"

"It was like a *feu d'éclaireurs* more than anything else!" said the lieutenant.

"I have got about a score of birds," I said, "and you might have bagged as many yourselves if you had come, but you preferred keeping watch here. I warrant you never left the cabin; and then, when you will go ashore and back home, you will complain that there are no birds to be seen, and no fun to be had."

In sober truth, that is usually how things take place. A lot of fellows go together for a shooting excursion down the river; but instead of trying their best to see birds, they are content with peeping out of the cabin once or twice every half-hour, and when night sets in, they get up a roaring fire, put on their slippers, mix grog, and listen to each other's yarns until one o'clock in the morning, when they turn into their bunks. Finally, after three or four days' cruising they return to the bosom of their respective families, where they relate, according to their individual constitutions, either that they shot plenty of birds, only they could not get them, or that there were no birds at all to be had. Not a word is said of the laziness, yarning, and quiet drinking that had reigned supreme during the trip, of course; and an intending shooter, hearing such direful tales, makes up his mind to try another spot.

Now, I like a good fire, a good yarn, and a good glass, as well as any man; but let everything be in its place, and come in its turn, say I, and when I go shooting I intend shooting, and the rest must be but a pleasant accompaniment to it.

I chaffed my fellows mercilessly on the subject; and though they pretended that they were chaff-proof, still, on the next day, they evinced far more liveliness than they had done before.

Have you ever, reader, sailed in a small yacht, at night, on the river Thames? If so, don't you think with me that it is very entertaining, though some fogies detest it, and assert that it is dangerous?

Of course, there are the screws with their screeching whistles, going up and down all night, the Continental paddle steamers taking advantage of the tide, the sailing ships, barges, &c., coming up noiselessly, like some gigantic monsters of the deep ready to swallow you up, yacht and all, including the red-hot stove. But then, taken all in all, such watchfulness as one is bound to exhibit on such a much-frequented river as the Thames, only gives

a zest to your enjoyment, when you have just "had a shave," and have escaped scot-free. And then, the internal comforts of the boat, with its cosy cabin, its warm cushions, its reading-lamp swinging from the roof, the cooking utensils appearing dimly for'ard in a dark cupboard, and the sparkling bottles in an open locker, all these things make you feel comfortable; and the working of the boat, amidst its many enemies, tends to give a charm to the sport which one necessarily cannot have on land. One is in a small yacht, like the snail of the poet:

On porte avec soi sa maison.

And that is very jolly, and none the less so, for the dangers which the said floating domicile has occasionally to encounter.

Whilst stretched in my berth I heard the sails being hoisted and the anchor being got up; I felt the yacht swinging round and bending to the breeze, and the ripple began on the bows. Some little time after, I heard Charlie's voice shouting "Half-past one!" evidently to a bargee or waterman, who had asked him what was the time, and all fell into oblivion, until the rattle of the cable woke me up, and I knew we were at Shorn.

I got up and went on deck. There was a slight fog, but I recognised the old place instantly. We were about a hundred yards from the Kent shore, snugly ensconced in the bend, out of the way of the traffic.

How cheerless everything seemed when the fog completely surrounded us! It came on so thick that, at one time, we could hardly see our own mast-head light. Fortunately, we were not in the way of the steamers; but as it was, one—a screw—lost evidently as to its whereabouts, came by us, blowing its steam-whistle and ringing its fog-bell like mad. They had to stop altogether, and finally they too came to an anchor, but kept on their whistling and tolling, until it was quite unbearable. Of course, it was out of the question for us to set sail and change our quarters, for two reasons—the first, there was no wind; the second, we could not see our way quick enough for such fast work as sailing generally is. I said to Charlie:

"It is no good our stopping here, now that this infernal whistle has begun that row. Let us get into the dingy, and tow the yacht down to the large creek. There might be birds there."

We did so, and dropped anchor in a good position. It was about 5 A.M. then, and still very foggy and dull. We were in hopes, however, that the sun would eventually clear away the fog; but nothing of the kind took place, though at about seven it was a little brighter, and at eight it seemed likely to get up. I got then into the dingy with Tom and his long gun, and the lad pulled

us along the creek. I landed, but Tom remained in the boat. It was very cold, and a smart frost had made the marsh crackly, rendering it unfit for birds, except in the ditches and creeks. I flushed a snipe, and killed it; thereupon, I heard Tom's gun going off too, but could not see him, though I heard him call out after me. I went with all speed towards the voice; but as they kept on moving it was some time before I came up with them. They were in pursuit of a duck they said.

"It is wounded, sir," said the lad, "and it fell before us; but though I pulled for it at once, we cannot find it, and I think it is gone ashore."

"Well, look out on the water. I will walk along here, and keep pace with you; if the bird is here we will find it."

We went a little way, then the fog increased so much in intensity that I could hardly discern the boat, though it was but twenty yards from me. Suddenly—

"Here he is!" and boom! from the big gun.

"Dived again!" said the enraged Tom.

Then the bird popped out, behind the boat, it seems, for I heard the boy calling out to me:

"Fire, sir, fire astern! There he is!"

"I can't see anything," I said; "if I did I would fire, but don't shout so!"

I could hear Tom ramming his wads with energy, then I heard him swear about a cap; finally there was a red flash in the fog, a terrible explosion, and then a satisfied remark that they had him, that time.

I heard the oars being plied vigorously, and—

"At last," exclaimed Tom, "we have got him! Where are you?" to me.

"Here!"

"It is only a teal after all," he went on; "but, in the fog, he appeared so large that I thought it was a duck."

The fog was then so intense that it was impossible for me to proceed, as I might have broken my neck, perhaps got lost, and certainly could not have seen clearly enough to shoot anything.

So, "Come ashore to pick me up," I said, "and let us go back to the yacht."

We spent the most wretched day it has ever been my lot to spend on the water; the fog never cleared till 7 or 8 P.M., so that the day seemed to us interminable.

When there was sufficient moonlight in the evening to see our course, we set sail and went without stopping right down to Queenborough, where we anchored at about eleven o'clock. The sky

was cloudy, but the moon being full, or nearly so, we could see well enough to shoot at flocks, if any had come our way. It was much milder then, than it had been all day, but a drizzling rain put a stop to an excursion which we intended to undertake in the small boat.

We went to bed, and the next morning proved quite favourable. At half-past six, we started; Tom took the Queenborough shore, the lieutenant the other, and I remained in the boat with the lad. Bang! from the left, and Tom is running. Bang, bang! from the right, and the lieutenant goes down the bank, then reappears holding two birds. We went on thus, occasionally crossing over for either of my companions when they had large creeks before them, until within sight of Rochester Bridge, when they both came into the small boat, and we pulled back to the yacht. We had altogether about forty birds.

Whenever any of my companions banged at a flock, the flock almost invariably had also a bang or two from me, for they seemed to make it a rule to fly up or down stream, zigzagging in all directions.

At eleven we were back, we had a quick dinner, then we got out of the snug little harbour with some trouble, on account of the tide rising fast, and shaped our course towards the Essex bank. It was drizzling then, and the mess the cabin soon was in was a caution, for marsh mud is proverbially a sticky compound. My time drawing near, and the breeze being fair, we arranged to sail back along the shore, and whenever we came to a likely creek, into the dingy we went, and we quickly beat it, two on land and one in the boat, so that no time was lost in disposing of the birds when there were any. It thus happened that while the boat was still behind a bank, a flock of curlews and oxbirds came down towards us, never seeing us till they were within thirty yards. There never has been there, such firing as took place, there and then. Tom's big gun cut down a regular lane among them, and ours concluded the massacre. The best fun, however, was the picking up and shooting the cripples. A curlew ran over a hundred yards, crossing lots of empty holes, creeks, &c., and had to be shot at, once more, before he could be secured.

Our next bit of luck was in a creek, about a mile and a half from Tilbury, when we met two watermen in a boat, who told us that a flock of ducks were near the head of the creek. They had seen them go down there, they said, and no doubt they were there still. We went towards the spot, but found no birds.

"There may be a spring or a ditch close by," I remarked; and my surmise was right, for no sooner had our heads appeared above

the banks than five teal, not ducks, rose from a ditch about sixty yards away, and, thanks to the big gun, we got two.

It was then half-past three or a quarter to four, and there being no other place worth visiting, we went back to the yacht, where we gave our informants a stiff glass as a reward, and within an hour we were at Tilbury, where I landed, and got just in time for a Fenchurch Street train.

Now, it is not everybody who has a friend placing his yacht at one's disposal whenever one feels inclined for a sail, therefore carrying on sport as we did is, virtually, out of the reach of a good percentage of shooters; but I will tell such what they can do. If they can spare a day, they had better go down by train to Erith or Greenhithe, and there hire a boat for the day, to take them as far down as the state of the river will allow. Supposing they beat Greenhithe and Northfleet marshes, then tacked over and had a tramp along the Essex shore, afterwards sailed down to Tilbury, beat the marshes there, visited the creeks and so forth, and then went over to Shorn Battery, and quartered Shorn marshes; then, if they had time, went back to the Essex shore, and saw there what was to be got, I warrant, if they were fair shots, and used proper guns and ammunition, that they would bring down a load of birds, and the trip would not be a very expensive one either. The best place, however, for large birds is on the shore from Southend upwards, for, large creeks abound there, and are always more or less tenanted. There are some puntsmen who live at Benfleet, and at some other villages along the Essex shore, but they had not, as yet, begun work for the season, the heavy flocks not congregating together, in any great numbers, until the weather is very cold, and storms have driven the birds up the river for shelter.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE BLACKWATER.

It is singular that a large percentage of our wildfowling gunners are not aware of the splendid sporting capabilities offered to them by the Blackwater. Yet this is, for Londoners, one of the nearest spots, and its worth as a wildfowl ground is not to be despised. An hour-and-a-half's rail will bring the intending shooter to Maldon, and half-an-hour's walk from the station (either along the river-side on the towing-path, or else round by the sea-wall) will bring him to the Heybridge basin, which is the head-centre for sport, as regards the Blackwater.

Along the towing-path there is not much to be done, in day-time, even in winter weather, inasmuch as the little river, which is so narrow that it needs not a good gun to command the opposite shore as well as the one the shooters are on, is too much disturbed by the passers-by, without mentioning the few barges that are towed up and down from the basin to the Maldon mills and to Maldon itself. In fact, this towing-path is also the shortest road from Maldon proper to the basin, and as, at the basin, there are now at least, two score of houses, with their usual contingents of children going to school, and women going to market, besides the sailor part of the community who go up and down in barges or boats, it stands to reason that birds cannot bear tamely such a continuous series of disturbances. Hence the absence of sport there, except very early in the morning, when no traffic has, as yet, taken place, and when the weather is very cold. I have myself bagged there teal, and a duck or two, on sundry occasions, under such circumstances; but, to succeed, one must have a good and powerful water-spaniel, who knows his business thoroughly. The river is held up—so to speak—between banks that are higher than the fields that surround it; and on the opposite shore there is a ditch, which is hid from the shooter's view, in which there is

always water—in winter-time a good deal of it—and as that shore is without any path or traffic of any kind, the birds that have come there remain undisturbed and unknown to anybody. But if your dog has sense and obedience, send him over, and order him down along that ditch, whilst you watch the river yourself, as you walk on the towing-path. If he flushes anything, you will have a good chance of bagging. Of course no half-broken water-dog will suit there; for, if the dog runs on and flushes the birds indiscriminately the moment he scents them, and is mindless of your distance from them, why, although he may come from a good breed, he has not in him the sense necessary for any work of that kind.

In fact, none but good dogs, and old ones too, can be expected to answer one's expectations in such cases, for the dog must intuitively regulate his motions from yours. When once down the bank he can no longer see you, but then he can hear your footsteps, and a good dog flushes when he hears that you are close at hand. Unfortunately, there are very few such intelligent dogs to be had now, and if a man must have such, he must perforce train them to his own standard.

As a general rule, in very hard weather, and at dawn of day only, are there perhaps half-a-dozen birds to be picked up in that wise along the river.

Now, one may also walk down from Maldon proper to the basin, *viâ* the salt-water bank, along which there is always something to be found, either on the mud, in the ditches, or overhead; for the whole extent of space from Maldon down to the sea is but a vast feeding ground for the birds, and the number that congregate there will astonish anyone previously unacquainted with the place.

The best gun for that sort of work is a large-bore gun, that can be heavily loaded. Shot No. 5 is about the best, as it will kill anything, however tough, if within proper range, and will also allow one to fire into flocks with satisfactory execution, when they whirl by.

The best plan to adopt, however, for any man who can spare several days, is to secure lodgings at the basin itself. There is an inn there, and several of the puntsmen have lodgings in their houses, which they let to their customers. There is one of these puntsmen whom I can recommend to any intending sportsman, and that is young Clark. This young fellow owns a small fishing smack, whose cabin, though small, comes very handy when it rains, or one has to dry one's clothes, boots, or stockings by the stove, in the event of a capsize on the mud flats. Besides the little smack, he owns a dingy, a punt, a swivel-gun, and a long-

barrelled shoulder-gun, with which he himself goes fowling, when the weather suits. Of course all these implements of warfare are at the disposal of his customers, provided the said customers supply the ammunition. Altogether there are, at the basin, above a dozen men who own punts and swivel-guns, and this may give an idea of the sporting worth of the place as regards fowling.

There used to be a decoy at Goldhanger, a few miles from the basin, opposite Wood's Island, and I remember well, when that decoy was in working order, the innumerable grumbles of the puntsmen against the whole concern. It was an awful nuisance, they said, as it prevented them (the puntsmen) from going over a good part, the best, perhaps, of the Blackwater, and they did not see why they should not fire there as well as anywhere else. Of course, the bye-laws of the decoy forbade such a course, within a certain fixed radius from the decoy. But, bless you! the puntsmen trespassed continually, and it led to no end of disputes, quarrels, and contingences. The decoy could not possibly work satisfactorily, when the swivel-guns were brought to bear on the birds so near its entrance; and, for a single puntsman shooting at a bunch of half-a-dozen birds, he perhaps flushed and rose hundreds on their way to the trap. Such a state of things was highly unsatisfactory, particularly so to the decoy owner or lessee, I should imagine, though the puntsmen of course lamented their fate more loudly than anyone else.

Now, it strikes me that as the puntsmen's offences were, after all, frequently overlooked, such tolerance was very badly rewarded by their continual annoyances in trespassing. Howbeit, that this led to the shutting up of the decoy, there is not the slightest doubt, and it is not now worked at all. Naturally enough, as a shooter, I am prejudiced against all devices for the capturing of large quantities of fowl, dead or alive, by any means whatsoever. In my opinion, as a shooter, all birds ought to have but one enemy to contend against, and that, I take it, ought to be the shoulder-gun, *par excellence*. If anything, I should, however, tolerate the swivel-gun; for this reason, that it takes such a knowledge of the ground, of the haunts of the birds, and it requires such a deal of patience and exertion, in order to have one single shot, that I do not begrudge the puntsmen the number of birds they sometimes sweep down at one discharge. At any rate, even under the most favourable circumstances, no amount of puntsmen can bag what a decoy will absorb, and that is why I dislike decoys. But, as regards the Blackwater and the Goldhanger decoy, would you believe, reader, that the puntsmen are now grumbling more than ever? I said to one during my trip:

"Now, what fault have you to find, I should very much like to hear? When the decoy was working, you said everything that was nasty concerning it; now it is no longer used, and you complain still more! What is up now?"

"Well, master, I tell you what it is. When the decoy worked, it drew birds, and, though the decoy took the largest share, we had the pickings, and that was not bad. The place was kept very quiet, do you see, and no barges were allowed to pass by, anywhere near. So the birds came to it of their own accord, seeing that it was peaceful. But now the barges sail up there, and anchor too, when it suits them, and what with their presence, and the bargees firing too at the birds, whenever there's a chance, the spot is deserted by the fowl, and we don't get none of them!"

But, really, puntsmen have no cause to complain; they roam about at will, and reap occasionally a fine harvest of birds, besides the fun of the thing.

Moreover, although professional puntsmen assert, with truth, that their pursuit entails very hard labour, there is no doubt that punting is for them a labour of love, and that they delight in it. No man would carry it on, year after year, without a stronger incentive than merely trying to make a living out of it.

The truth is, when a man has once felt the delight of sitting in his own punt and being his own free master, and has enjoyed the sport, he never willingly gives it up. Most puntsmen live and die puntsmen. In the fine season they fish or they work at calking, carpentering, or other odd jobs; but when the weather once more turns hard, and the birds turn up, they look at them wistfully, give up anything they may have on hand, and once more launch again the punt. If this is not a passion for fowling I don't know what is, and I respect the men for that feeling, whatever may be their other defects.

Well, now to actual sport on the Blackwater.

I spent on it two days, and I can book both as red-letter days. I had arranged to go over it in my friend Charlie's yacht, and he had sailed his boat there, when I received a note from him stating that he was safe and sound, within a mile or so of the basin, and that he would meet me at the Maldon railway station. On Monday afternoon, the day agreed upon, as I was making cartridges, a friend of mine turned up, and would have joined me for the trip, but he could only spare the next day, and rather than run the risk of hampering our motions he declined the offer of coming down to the yacht, but said he would go to Maldon with me, and hire a boat at the basin for his own use. This he did, so that I have two accounts of the sport

to give my readers. At about eight o'clock on that Monday evening, then, my friend and I reached Maldon, and at the station we met Charlie and a man who had piloted his boat up the Blackwater. They had come ashore with the dingy, and we rowed back to the yacht with my traps and gear, leaving our friend comfortable at an inn.

On board, as per agreement, I found Tom and a friend of his. On deck I saw a punt, and lying in the punt a swivel-gun, ready for fixing, and with its leather cap on, therefore evidently loaded.

"Have you been out already?" I inquired.

Tom had that evening; but he had missed a shot, owing to the punt getting stranded just when a flock had settled within two hundred yards of him. There was, he said, a fair show of birds, but they were very wild as yet.

It being too late then for any attempt at fowling, we retired to bed as soon as we had discussed supper. The tide would be up at six in the morning, or thereabouts, and I made up my mind to try a swivel shot then—Tom, disgusted with his previous want of luck, declining to turn out early and have another try, whilst his friend, being a novice, thought he should make a mess of the affair, and so preferred staying in bed.

At four o'clock A.M., the pilot, who is himself a professional shooter, and who was to accompany me, woke me. We had a strong cup of coffee and some eatables, for he had lighted the galley fire, and made himself wonderfully handy, and at five we launched the punt. He went in her, rigged up the mast and its shoulder-of-mutton sail, shoved the swivel-gun into its breeching, primed the nipple, capped it, and covered it again with the flap, for there was a slight misty rain hanging about in the atmosphere.

"Now, sir," said he, "quite ready!" and in I stepped and sat down behind the gun, whilst he hoisted the sail, and shaped our course towards the feeding grounds.

For the uninitiated, I must explain that, when the tide rises, the puntmen creep along the creeks, near what they call the saltings—*i.e.* spots on the marsh that are covered with a peculiar grass, on which the fowl delight to feed. Of course these spots are only known to those men who have frequently visited the marsh, in day-time, or else who have, by fowling experience, found out where the birds do mostly congregate. A stranger might knock about all night, and not have the shadow of a chance, if he knew nothing of the place, unless he happened to fall in with the flocks, when, the tide being up, they float about feeding, diving, and so forth.

Soon after we had started towards the saltings, the weather

cleared up, and I could again discern astern of us the yacht's riding light.

"There is another punt, sir," said my guide, pointing out to me a pale shadow gliding round the bend of the river, "but he is going towards the decoy place, so we are all right, he won't interfere with us."

At the back of Wood's Island, as he called it, was a very wide marsh, but only one spot in it, he averred, was good, and towards that spot we went. There was only half an hour's more flow to come up, and the marsh was considerably flooded already.

I had brought a night-glass with me, and I then was made aware that a small portion of a flat was still bare, by the sight of a big heron, who was standing upon it, amongst a lot of other birds; of course, I would have liked a shot at the lot. But we were still at least four hundred yards from the spot, and we could get no nearer, as there was not enough water to float the punt. Two men and a heavy gun in the bows rather load a small skiff like that; but, as the tide was rising, there was no fear of our being caught, so we hauled down the sail and mast, and the man took the paddle and shoved us along whenever he had an opportunity. We thus gained about two hundred yards, when we fairly floated. The bare space of mud was now reduced to about fifty square feet, and the birds were huddled together very close. Fifty yards more, and we are positively in the midst of a perfect concert of cries and whistles, as a lot of birds are flying about, pipers in shoals, and oxbirds in perfect clouds. Fifty more yards; I am crouching close to the breeching, and carefully remove the leather flap; the cap is all right on the nipple, the gun is at full cock. I glance over the bows; we are now as near seventy yards as can be, from the birds; the heron is still in their midst, and him I take as my aiming point. I then rattle my foot against our ammunition box, up spring the birds, boom! goes the gun, and, before the smoke clears up, we shove forward quickly to the spot, and I lay hold of my double central-fire 10-bore Tolley, to "do" the cripples.

This last job, however, is a rather ticklish performance, for so many birds are fluttering about that I hardly know where to fire first. However, big birds first, say I, and bang! I nail a widgeon; bang! I hit the heron, who is trying to wade away from us.

Altogether, we had three widgeons, the heron, seven redshanks, and a teal; of the small fry, about a score.

The picking up of the lot took us so long, that what I had expected and feared took place—the tide turned, and we were stranded.

"We must quickly get out," I said, "and push the punt into deep water; now then, for pattens."

Overboard we went, but it was tedious work rather, until we got into a suitable spot, when we got in again, and rowed out of the way with all speed. We were, however, too heavily laden to undertake the shallows with confidence, as the tide was receding fast, so we kept in a creek, and anchored there, opposite a flat, hoping to have another shot.

Gradually the tide went down, and the salting got wider and wider, but no large birds turned up. On the other hand, hundreds of the sandpiping fraternity were patronising it already, but they were hardly worth the honours of a swivel-gun, so I did not fire at them; and, after waiting for some time, we went back to the yacht, where we found everybody astir and breakfast ready.

"There are plenty of birds," I said, "and we will start with the guns, after breakfast, for a tramp over the flats."

We did so, and shot about a hamper full of the smaller birds, besides which I bagged a teal and a duck in two shots, a right and left.

This is how it happened. I had landed about fifty yards from a large creek, according to my usual method, for, instead of tramping all the way, I have found by experience that it is better, after a creek has been duly visited, to row up to the next instead of tramping to it over the flats; it is less tiring, and when in the boat you are hidden from the sight of any birds that might give the alarm. Well, as I said, I had just landed, when I observed a watchful redshank going off from the creek.

"Hurrah!" I thought, "where there is one there are more; there is good luck in store here!"

The banks were about a yard and a half high, and bare, the tide being then rather low, and a few birds rose, out of range. A heron did the same; but when close to the creek, from my side of it, up sprang a duck with a fifty-duck quacking power, and at its noise, up went a teal, both in the same direction, but twenty yards between them. Oh! the glory of those double shots! I fired so quickly that both birds fell almost together, the duck on the other shore, the teal in the water.

Whilst I was in the creek picking up the teal, about a dozen redshanks came by, and I nailed one. In fact, there, all day we fired, and I enjoyed myself as much as ever I did in my life.

We came back to the yacht with a perfect load of birds, but with our cartridge-bags sadly flattened. This, however, was soon remedied, for we had brought plenty of ammunition. That is a thing which a wildfowl shooter never neglects, for he knows well

enough that though to-day he may not have occasion to fire ten shots, to-morrow he may have opportunities for firing fifty.

We had a glorious dinner, and I went into my berth to have a nap, in order to make up for my early rising, but in the evening I was up and doing. Tom went to do the evening punt work, and he subsequently bagged four teal and a widgeon. I fired from the yacht's deck at a flock of ducks, and one of them went splash close to the shore, where my companion settled it. Then night set in, and as we did not wish to prevent the puntsmen's success, we stopped firing. By-and-by, boom! we heard far in the distance, then several more big guns were fired within half an hour, and the evening's punting was over.

Tom came back at about nine with the birds I have mentioned, one of which was sadly spoiled, as he had fired his heavy shoulder-gun at it when it was crippled, and smashed it.

Early on the next day, I punted again. We went to a very good place, but, somehow, no large birds came to us, and I would not fire for oxbirds and the like. The tide was fast going, and, in fact, we had just got up our moorings and were drifting back, when my companion nudged me. I popped down, and then looked up in the direction he was steering for—a quiet peep. Three ducks and a teal, about a hundred yards away. I pointed silently to the big gun, in pantomime, to ask, shall I fire at them? Yes, he nodded. And I got ready. Nearer and nearer we got, but the ducks separated, and for fear of having only one left to shoot at, I pulled the trigger, and killed two. Then I bang at the teal, miss it; bang again, and he is hit, but goes away in the marsh.

That was all I did that morning, but I think it must have been on account of the many punts out. We counted no fewer than five sailing up and down.

We were then at a creek which is, at least, a mile in length and very broad, leading into a lot of other creeks, where we had plenty of fun in the course of the day. The weather was bitterly cold, so much so that when in the afternoon we had, all of us, got our feet wet by floundering across a piece of soft sward, when tramping without our mud-shoes, we had to beat a hasty retreat to the yacht's cabin, for we could not endure the cold. The weather became still colder as evening drew near; we had had some snow in the course of the day, and altogether it was a most promising change for the shooters, who were bound to reap a rich harvest if the weather kept at all hard and stormy.

My train, however, was due to start from Maldon at 6.35 P.M., and I could delay no longer, so I shook hands with Tom as he

was leaving in the punt, and we sailed up to the Northex Island, when the navigable part of the channel being rather narrow, we anchored, and I was pulled ashore in the dingy. Tom, I heard then, had shot seven birds, for, whilst at the basin, we met a fisherman who had just seen him kill them. Thus ended two most pleasant days' sport.

To those shooters who prefer walking, both sea-walls and all the flats on either shore are perfectly free to all comers. A good retrieving dog, however, will be found a *sine quâ non*, for some parts of the flats are too soft for a man to venture upon, unless he wears mud-shoes. As regards tramping over the flats, some degree of caution is necessary, for although some flats are hard enough for all purposes, the softer ones (and best) are not everywhere so. There are some spots where a shooter goes down when he least expects it, and when the spot appears, furthermore, rather wide, the best is to go back again on one's footsteps, rather than run the risk of a thorough flounder in the cold bogs.

Shooting over the Blackwater from boats is more satisfactory, but the channel must be well-known. The best plan is either to hire a sailing boat with a punt or dingy, which their owner will manage for you, or if you go with your own boats up the Blackwater it will be well to get a fisherman, or, better still, a puntman, to pilot the crafts about.

The friend of mine who had come down with me to shoot over part of the place had hired Clark's boats, and he told me that he shot a diver and several redshanks in the course of the day, with only a 16-bore shoulder-gun. It is especially through this friend's praise of young Clark that I have recommended him; but I know him too, and he is a well-behaved and attentive young fellow.

The Blackwater is not much frequented by vessels. I have not seen any craft heavier than our own during my stay, except two or three barges. On the other hand, punts abound, and on the beach, in day-time, amongst the few fishing-boats, are always half-a-dozen, or more, punts, with their swivel-guns ready for the next turn at the fowl.

Now, to anyone in search of a good wildfowl spot, I do not think there is any better and nearer to town than the Blackwater, and I can strongly recommend it to any intending fowler. The trains start now from Liverpool Street Station, and run down to Maldon, changing at Witham, in an hour and a half, or so. The accommodation, at the Heybridge inn, is comfortable enough for sportsmen, but not sumptuous enough to suit a

fastidious man ; so, intending fowlers make a note of it. Make up your minds to enjoy yourselves there on the rough-and-ready principle, and leave your dignity and patent boots at home, for both would be sadly out of place, I fear, at the inn or on the flats.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE SOLENT AND SOUTHAMPTON WATER.

Both the Solent and Southampton Water are favourites with shooting yachtsmen and puntsmen, as well as with shore gunners. On both there is plenty of room for sailing, on both are plenty of creeks for the puntmen to creep into, and the shores on both sides of the Southampton Water are noted for their marshes, flooded waste lands, reeds, streamlets, pools, and favourite flighting spots.

As regards sailing about, on sport intent, there is no restriction from anybody, and the only consideration for the yachtsmen is not to allow themselves to sail too much near shore, on account of the shallows, when induced to do so by the sight of birds. The best plan is to cruise about from creek to creek, when the shooters, in a punt, if the weather be calm, or in the dingy if it be rough, can visit all creeks, streamlets, and rivers, as they come up to them. The sport, in this latter style, is occasionally very fair, but I was not favoured with any great fun during the three days I spent there in December.

We had on board enough guns to stand an attack from pirates, and two of these guns would have certainly proved disastrous to any assailants at close quarters. They were about five feet long in the barrel, bore at the muzzle 6, although at the breech the bore was for cartridges calibre 4. These guns are built on the Snider principle, and can stand any amount of loading. Of course, they are only fit to shoot with from a boat, or from a stand-point on shore; walking about with them is quite out of the question. They are killers and no mistake; and so they ought to be, considering that their usual loads average from 9 drachms to 13 of best powder, and a proportionate quantity of shot. I could not tell how many ounces, for I do not measure or weigh the shot. When I have put in the cases the usual loads

of powder, I clap on the wads, and for fear of underloading in shot, I generally fill up the cases with it, having just enough for the top wad to be inserted, and creased over. One of the guns weighs 15 lb., the other one 17 lb., and the recoil is not very perceptible, when they are held properly. Of course it does not do to fire such guns hastily and anyhow, as I have seen them done several times, in the course of my wildfowling career.

A young fellow once was standing on deck, and fired a fifteen-pounder at a flock of geese. He killed five of them, but he was himself knocked down the cabin, heels over head, and though, fortunately, not hurt, the tumble was neither pleasant for him to bear, nor for us to witness.

Another time a lad who was in my service, whilst on watch on deck, saw some birds coming, and, according to the inspiration of the moment, he fired at them. I was not on board at the time, but, when I came back, the boy was in his berth, and his shoulder, breast, right arm, and right cheek were black and blue, from the terrible recoil he had experienced, through not shouldering the big gun properly.

On the Solent and Southampton Water, such large weapons are necessary, because the extent of water is so considerable, that unless you can reach the birds at long distances, it is almost useless undertaking the job.

That is, of course, when sailing about: for, in the creeks, or on the rivers, &c., a strong double 10-bore will answer the purpose as well as any gun, for single shots, or shots at small bunches of birds; but when large flocks of tough birds are about, nothing can be more satisfactory than the use of the heavy shoulder-guns, such as those I have described. I always decry the use of such in narrow or much frequented rivers, because the shot is propelled to such awful distances, occasionally, that though at 200 yards they cannot possibly do much harm, still it is not pleasant to have then a handful of BBB shot rattling over your face, as you are watching a fellow who is having a shot at a passing flock. I have experienced that feeling three or four times myself, and it does not make you feel secure. One of the pellets hitting you in the eye would probably put an end to all further shooting excursions on your part, at least for that day.

The recklessness exhibited by some men when firing heavy loads is next to incredible. I have seen men, on the river Thames, when forty vessels were anchored below the Ship and Lobster in Gravesend Reach, cruising about with heavy guns, and firing at birds that were passing between them and the ships. The crews' blessings on the bold shooters' heads may be

imagined; it was enough to make the hair on one's fur cap stand on end.

As I have said already, such heavy guns are not particularly safe when near shore, and I should not think of firing them horizontally at a flock, if close to land and there was any bank over which someone might be peeping, or reeds behind which men might be hidden; but when the flocks pass overhead, or you are on a broad sheet of water, with everything clear for several hundred yards, there is no reason why the big guns should not come into play.

Some men who know nothing of wildfowl, assert that flock-guns are unsportsmanlike, because they kill several birds at a shot. As far as this goes, the flock-guns are not responsible for it. Since the birds *will* travel in flocks, even if you shoot, when close to them, with an ordinary gun, not only the bird you aim at gets it hot, but his immediate neighbours are bound to come in for their share of the peppering. But, as an ordinary gun would have but few chances of being brought to bear close enough to the birds for any good execution, naturally enough, wildfowlers have to resort to such guns as will reach the birds as far as ingenuity can make guns carry shot, with sufficient power to kill at very long ranges. No man would expect to bag wildfowl, in any fair quantities, with a 16 or 12-bore gun, when sailing on a large estuary.

As regards flock-guns, I have possessed some of the old-fashioned muzzle-loaders, and think that they did not come up at all to what the breech-loading guns are now being made to perform, without mentioning the many inconveniences of which all muzzle-loading guns, but particularly long ones, subject those who use them. The old long-barrelled wildfowl muzzle-loaders never carried so far, and killed so neat and so well as the modern breech-loading flock-guns do, and they were an awful nuisance to load. Yet, there are still some of these guns to be seen, especially in the shops of those gunsmiths who live in places where wildfowl shooting is carried on to any extent. Southampton, I need not say, is one of those places. In years past, one of the shops (now Cox's) in the High Street, used to have immense attractions to me, on account of its show of implements. I remember a long swivel-gun that stood propped up against one of the show cases, and that gun was the object of my awe and admiration. It must have been pretty nearly ten feet long, as near as I can recollect, and it was one of the old flintlocks, *en vogue* a century ago.

As a matter of course, plenty of boats of all sorts are to be had at Southampton; but I should certainly not advise an amateur to engage the first boatman he comes to, but to arrange with some

of the well-known men who make it their business to take shooters about, and can be confidently trusted, not only in the management of their craft, but also to show the pet places for sport to their customers. I have been several times on such excursions with the Parkins, father and son, and I can recommend them as good and trustworthy men. They own a 10-ton boat and a punt or two, and in summer-time take parties out fishing in the estuary; in autumn and winter time they take wildfowlers down the water, or go themselves on their own "hook," at least they used to do so. Two or three years ago I remember their bagging a wonderful lot of birds in the course of a morning, and it is no mean recommendation to a shooter to know that his guides and boatmen are themselves fowlers of some merit. As regards sport, if sport is to be had, the Parkins will find it out for their customers. I daresay there are other trustworthy and clever boatmen about the quay, but I only speak of those I have myself seen at work. Whilst on this subject, I would give some of the boating fraternity a friendly hint, which, if acted upon, will certainly prove beneficial to them, viz. not to consider themselves as their employers' equals, to begin with, as some of the new school seem to do; secondly, not to chew, and spit, and use foul epithets, whether they have, or have not, ladies on board. A gentleman who goes out wildfowling is not bound to put up with a badly-bred and evil-tongued crew, and if he once finds out that his men are so inclined, "he makes a note of it," and has them no more, at least that is what I do, and others, I know, do the same. Presuming is a great fault of the age, and I know many a clever boatman who is left in the lurch, simply because he makes himself too familiar when afloat. I like boatmen; I sympathise with them; and I should like them all to be well-to-do and prosperous, for theirs is a hard and precarious calling, and as regards work they generally honestly do their best; therefore, friendly advice which is sure to be beneficial to them, ought to give them no ground for offence. Those who don't need it, will know that others do.

I went to Southampton, for my trip, one fine Monday morning, by the first train, and at noon we started. The weather was beautiful and frosty; the tide high, or nearly so. One of the Cowes steamers had just come in with some passengers, and among them was another gunner joining our party. We were then, altogether, four shooters, and the array of guns on deck was formidable. We dropped down the water quietly, under reefed mainsail and only a foresail, as we did not want to fly about like mad beings; but for an hour or two, very few birds did we see,

though the weather was eminently favourable. The first shots we had were at a diver. We had just gone down into the cabin for a glass of wine, when, happening to glance through one of the windows as I sat on the port cushions, I perceived the bird on our starboard side, and about 100 yards away from the yacht. You should just have seen how quickly the cabin was evacuated. The sight of so many heads popping up suddenly, and facing him, naturally had the effect of sending the bird under the surface. There we were, straining our eyes in the expectation of seeing him re-appear, whilst the yacht's head was turned about his spot. Each of us had laid hold of a gun, and it was rather an emulating scene as to who should have the first shot.

"Here he is!" said our helmsman.

And there was the bird, on our port side, this time, and one of the shooters actually levelled his gun at him.

"Don't fire," said I, "he is too far."

"The shot will reach him there, surely," protested the anxious gunner.

"That is, the shot can certainly kill him where he is, if he would but stay there, for I see you have one of the flock-guns; but he will dive at the flash, and be down before the shot reaches him."

"Well, never mind; here goes."

From my place I saw perfectly the whole performance. Boom! At the flash, the bird went down, and the shot rattled *where he had been*; but there he was no longer to be seen.

"Up he comes!" shouts someone a moment after.

Bang! from a 10-bore gun. Down again.

"There he is!"

Boom! This time the flock-gun's shot reached him before he had had time to reconnoitre and to breathe perchance, and he remained lifeless on the water. First bird.

Up comes the dingy. Cook—one of my friend's yachtsmen—jumps in it, and rows up to the bird, and we pick him up on our next tack.

We next saw two or three bunches of birds hugging the New Forest shore, and, seeing two birds pitching into some reeds, I got into the dingy, and Cook rowed me towards the spot. Both rowlocks and oars being well garnished with supple leathers, the rowing made no noise, and I felt sure we should come upon the birds. Cook pulled for a suitable spot, when suddenly I put my hand up, and he stopped. I had just had a glance at a bend, and the two birds were there, sitting on the water. Evidently they had not seen us, and I could easily have bagged both, had

not a man, who was on shore, fired a gun at some other birds a considerable distance off, when the noise disturbed my birds, and I could only kill one on the wing. The other one was past all range, except, perhaps, of the rifles with which, as the continental correspondent of a daily paper [I think] said, the Prince of Wales and party shot at driven partridges in France.

On our way back to the yacht we fell in with a fishing-smack, where jollity reigned supreme; one of the crew was singing, and the others doing chorus. They had got into a shoal of sprats, and had caught about £20 worth.

Then we met a small decked-boat, with only one man in it, who asked me whether I would buy some widgeons and ducks, as he had some for sale.

"Where did you get them?" I asked.

"Oh! from a chap as is always a shooting yonder down the water," pointing anywhere, over his shoulder.

I clambered on board and he exhibited his birds, five widgeons, a teal, and three ducks.

"These birds have been shot this morning," he said, "and I don't want much for them; I will let you have the lot for a pound, there! I gave sixteen shillings for them myself."

"Now, now," I remonstrated mildly.

"It is a fact, sir, may I be blanked blanked if I did not."

"Then," I remarked, "I am much afraid you will be, indeed, blanked, for you never bought these birds—you shot them yourself."

And I pointed out to him two guns, evidently covered over to prevent their being seen, but which, in his navigation of the boat, he had unwittingly uncovered. One was a swivel, and it carried, he said, half a pound of shot; the other one was an old musket.

"That is the one to bring 'em down!" said the man, enthusiastically, as he forsook his part, and we began talking of sport.

"But," I asked him, "why did you pretend that you had bought the birds?"

"Well, since they have passed that law about licences, we don't care about showing off much, do you see, and so we do it on the sly—you understand!"

I told him I did not want his birds, but that if he sailed up to the yacht he would find there, perhaps, someone to buy them. I heard afterwards that the ducks had been bought from him by one of our party who did not want to go home empty-handed. There are some shooters who provide, in that way, against being laughed at.

In the course of the afternoon, those who had remained on

board the yacht bagged three more divers, a large sea-gull had been shot, and several black-ducks had been seen.

As evening drew near, however, we observed a few flocks coming seaward, and I proposed that we should anchor where we were, for the night, just opposite a point between which and the yacht a few shots might reasonably be expected.

At four o'clock, we accordingly came to an anchor, and presently I went ashore with another shooter, taking with us the two 4-bore flock-guns, and about a dozen rounds of cartridges.

A man who had observed our landing, thereupon came down to us, and said some birds were in a pool, close by, and he would take us to them for half-a-crown.

"Done!" I said, "that is, if there are really birds."

He agreed, and we went with him, and as we got near the place, the man motioned us to stop, and after crawling cautiously up a bank he slid down again.

"They are there, sure enough—seven of them, real ducks, I take them to be," he whispered.

Up we went, and, taking advantage of a thick tuft of grass, peeped through.

"The man is mad!" I said to my companion as we came down again. "Why, those birds are 250 yards away, at the very least."

"Well," said the man, "as to that, of course I can't measure the distance, but those guns of yours ought to go that way anyhow."

(Another case for the daily reporter's rifles, I thought.)

"In course," argued the man, "I am entitled to my half-crown. I showed you the birds, did I not?"

"Certainly," I said, "here is your half-crown."

And we set about trying to circumvent the fowl.

Whilst doing so, I observed that the man was making off, and the thought struck me that he had imposed upon us. When we were about a hundred yards nearer, we heard a woman's voice calling out, "Piah, Piah, Piapiah!"

We got up the bank, then, and saw the supposed wild-birds swimming towards the woman, and she alluring them to her home, and their shed. They were evidently her own ducks! We looked awfully silly as we stared at each other. The man was then about two hundred yards away on the other side of a small marsh, dancing on the bank, and waving his hat with glee. What is deferred is not lost; evidently, the fellow makes a practice of the trick, and I hope I may catch him at it some other day, when he will get a gentle reminder. Should this meet his eye (as adver-

tisements say) he had better "make a note of it;" and let intending shooters take warning from our laughable adventure.

We came back again to the shore in no very pleased mood, and seeing no large birds coming, I was suggesting the propriety of loading with smaller shot, and firing at some of the innumerable flocks of sandpipers that passed behind and before us, when my companion said he saw ducks coming. They, however, passed very high, and we devoted our energies to the oxbirds and sandpipers.

Everyone knows how queer these birds are in their habits. When night draws near, they assemble in immense flocks, and sweep here and there over the water, and finally settle sometimes on the shore itself, and sometimes on the flats. But no one who has not seen the effects of a 4-bore flock-gun, loaded with No. 5 shot, fired into a tribe of these birds, can imagine the case in point.

As the boom is still ringing, the birds fall like hail, and as they are a tough and hard-lived set, those that are not severely hit, keep up with the flock as long as they can, and if your eyes are kept on the flock you see some birds coming down yet for a hundred yards or more. Our first sweep was at a very large flock, and both guns, fired consecutively, floored over one hundred birds. We filled with them the stern-sheets of the dingy, and then we went aboard again, as it was too dark to shoot, or at least too dark to collect the killed.

The weather was colder than ever, and we were in anticipation of a fine day on the morrow; but that was not to be. We sailed farther down round the point, and there remained at anchor, ready for the morning flight. We were at the entrance of the estuary of the little river that passes the village called Beaulieu, south of the New Forest, and I know the spot to be a very good one from past experience; but, although the weather kept fine till three or four in the morning, I was then made aware, by the pitter-patter of heavy drops of rain on deck, that a change for the worse had taken place. I slipped on part of my clothes and went on deck, where one of the men was keeping watch.

"Nasty wind this, sir," said he; "sou'-west, and if it keeps on, the rain will last all day."

I looked at my watch when I went down again—four o'clock. I knocked the barometer and looked up to it with the lamp—Rain and stormy. The man had stepped down after me, and when I told him what the oracle was telling us to expect, he suggested calling up the "Governor," and a minute after, up came Charlie, who decided that we must shift our quarters, as there would be a gale presently.

I dressed, then, and we mustered on deck for the working of the boat, which was already straining heavily on her cable. However, we soon got her under way.

In an hour or so we passed the point, and hugging close to shore, we dropped anchor. There, we were sheltered by the hills, and by the forest, and we rode out the gale, which lasted all day and evening. We had several shots in the course of the day, bagged another diver and two coots.

Thus Tuesday was spent, miserably enough. Wednesday morning was not quite so boisterous, neither did the rain come down so heavily. At any rate, this being my last day, I had made up my mind to have it out, as best I could. I went on shore with the small boat, and we stopped in the reeds for a shot. We had been on the watch for twenty minutes, when five curlews came by, unsuspectingly, and I nailed three.

From the yacht, they fired at a flock of ducks, and brought two down, with one of the flock-guns.

In the afternoon, the weather cleared up somewhat, and we sailed up and down until the evening drew near, when we had to go up the Southampton Water to the town, where two of us wanted to catch the nine o'clock train. We arrived opposite the docks at 7 P.M., went ashore all together, and had a parting dinner and a chat over the incidents of the last three days. We heard then that the marshmen—*i.e.* those who shoot over the soft-water marshes—had had splendid sport, owing to the quantity of water that had fallen, and to the late boisterous weather, which had driven the birds away from the sea, and forced them to seek shelter inland, in the regular marshes and flooded waste lands. Thus, a puntman who does not live twenty miles from the old Coast Guard station had shot eleven ducks at a shot, and fourteen at another. Another man, who lives at Portswood, or thereabouts, had had half-a-dozen shots with a large-bore single muzzle-loader at flocks, and if his gun had not missed fire twice, he would perhaps have doubled his score, viz. nine birds.

"Truly 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good," and whilst we, at sea, had been lamenting our fate, the shore gunners had been having good sport.

I have often thought what fine duck-shooting marshes some of the wastes near Southampton would make, if they were properly worked and looked after. As it is, men go over them to shoot starlings, and for two or three small birds they prevent hundreds of ducks from settling there.

On both the rivers Itchen and Test, it is almost impossible to have a crack at wildfowl, on account of a few men going thus

along the reeds in the afternoons, to pop at starlings, whose *murmurations* are there immense, and it rather "riles" wildfowl shooters to see those two nice rivers thus desecrated. When no one has disturbed the birds there are always teal and ducks, occasionally a snipe or two, and geese, in hard weather, to be found about, but so long as the starling amusement is carried on, farewell to fowl, and farewell to sport, at least on the rivers.

At Southampton, there is accommodation for every class of shooter, and either on the streams, on the rivers, on the Southampton Water, or on the Solent, there is sport for all tastes and for all guns. So, wildfowlers who would like to try their luck might go farther and fare worse than they would in the direct neighbourhood of Southampton.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT RYE OLD HARBOUR.

One evening, during some conversation on the subject of these wildfowl expeditions of mine, a friend made a remark which struck me as, perhaps, embodying the thoughts of more than one of my readers.

"Those excursions," he said, "are certainly strong hints to men who own boats, and have leisure, as well as money; but, for hundreds of such men, there are thousands who neither own a boat, nor have a friend who owns one, nor can spare the time required for lengthy sails, from one wildfowl resort to another. Is there a place, within easy access of London, where a man can shoot wildfowl, without having to remain in a boat all day; where he may walk with a gun, and fairly enjoy himself at a moderate cost, and without danger of soft mud or treacherous bogs?"

As some of my readers may think the question a pertinent one, I will tell them what I answered him.

"There are a few places where a man fond of tramping may meet with occasional sport, but the only one that strikes me, just now, as being the place for you, is Rye, in Sussex. Are you disengaged on Monday, and can you spare two days?"

"Yes."

"Very well; meet me, then, at London Bridge Station for the 9.30 A.M. train, and we will go together."

"What gun am I to bring?"

"Not smaller than 12-bore; any bore bigger than that won't hurt."

"Good! What shot?"

"Nos. 4 and 6."

"Any wire cartridges?"

"No; I don't believe in them; but please yourself in that respect."

That is how it came to pass that we went to Rye.

I took with me an old Irish water-spaniel which had known what wildfowl shooting was for ten years, and I carried my Tolley double 10-bore. My companion had no dog, and he had brought also a 10-bore, by the same makers, so that we might use the same cartridges if one of us ran short of ammunition.

Whilst in the train, we were much amused by the opinions which a difference of pursuit engenders in different people. In our compartment was an old gouty gentleman, who was wrapped up in shawls and rugs as though he meant to defeat Jack Frost at any cost. When we arrived at Ashford, where we were to change, the old gentleman said, as he let down the window:

"It is freezing hard. How dreadful!"

"Oh, how jolly!" we exclaimed involuntarily, my companion and I.

"Why so?" asked he of the rugs and wrappers, with astonishment.

"Because the colder the weather the more birds shall we see."

"Do you mean to say you are going on the marshes?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is more than I would do. The thought makes me shiver."

I daresay the thought would have made us shiver too, had we been going without the guns. But then, there is some magic in a gun, which transforms a wretched-looking and dirty swamp into a perfect paradise. At any rate it produces that effect on me, and on a good many other fellows, so there must be something in it.

Well, we arrived at Rye early in the afternoon, and went up the old town, and then down to the fish market, to where the ferryman plies his trade. My friend was astonished at the sight of the houses which face the harbour. These are built *à pic* on the rock, and they seem to be erected on the top of each other. At any rate they produce a very startling effect, and I quite coincided with my friend's remark, that "these houses may be very comfortable, and soundly built, but I should not like to live in any of them."

And neither would I. It looks like an attempt at defying Providence, as the least motion in the substrata would pitch the lot into the meadows below.

Arrived at the ferry, we discussed which shore we would beat first. As we stood there, we saw large straggling flocks of field-

fares settling into the meadows on the left shore, behind the sea-wall; and my companion remarking that a fieldfare pie was not to be despised, said that at any rate he would make sure of a few, before going any farther.

"Will the dog fetch them?" he asked.

"He will retrieve anything from anywhere, without turning a feather from its place."

We crossed in the ferry-boat, and as soon as we were landed, began work—at least my friend did, for I was not going to waste my time running after fieldfares.

There is, about a quarter of a mile higher up, a broad ditch, abutting to the sea-reach, and in that ditch I remembered bagging a bird or two a year or two before, so I left my friend to come up at his leisure, and went at once towards the ditch. When I arrived at the hurdles near it, I climbed up the bank and peeped over. There were two teal at the bend, about a couple of hundred yards off, one on the water shaking himself, and the other one on shore. Having marked the birds' whereabouts, I hurried round, in momentary expectation that my friend's shots would frighten the birds away. Reaching the place, I had to ascend the bank, which was covered with pebbles, and the frost had hardened the lot so much that the moment I left the grass and stepped over them, I had to stop, for the noise would have given the alarm. But a little farther on was a spot covered with *débris*, that would just suit me, and towards it I went. I reached it safely, and I knew the birds were then in front of me, hidden behind the bank. I made sure that the gun was right, when "bang! bang!" in the distance behind me, and up flew the birds, but they had not a chance to escape, and I floored them beautifully. Both fell on the other bank of the broad ditch, and the dog went over to fetch them.

In coming back, he flushed a snipe from within ten yards of my feet. I so little expected the bird that I nearly lost it. I missed it with my first barrel, but fetched it down, an awful distance off, with the second.

Having pocketed both teal and snipe, I went back towards the harbour. A rough plank bridge is thrown over the creek, and there my companion joined me. He had about a dozen birds, including three sandpipers. We were then close to the old harbour, where a few brigs were unloading, and some fishing-smacks were on the mud. The tide being low, on our side of the harbour was a very large extent of mud and sand, bare, where a multitude of birds were feeding. I could see that they were neither curlews nor oyster-catchers, the lot consisting merely of

seagulls of different species, and of companies of oxbirds and sandpipers.

"But I don't care what I shoot, provided I shoot something," said my friend.

"Then you can stop here," I said, "and shoot over this part, up to the Coast Guard station, and I will hail a boat and cross over to the other side, where there is a beautiful marsh, and I daresay I shall get a duck or a teal there."

But he did not seem to relish stopping there alone, and determined to accompany me. It was past four then, and the evening was fast drawing in, so I remarked to my friend, who had hailed a boat, that we would just be in time for the evening flight.

The other side of the harbour is as unlike the one we were coming from, as can be. There are neither sands nor bare mud there, but heaps of shingle, directly along the shore, and the finest salt-water marsh imaginable behind it. I knew the place of old, and have always esteemed it highly. The high grass, the many small creeks, the large open pools of water, make it altogether about the best, safest, and the most pleasant salt marsh I have ever shot over. There are some rough bridges thrown over two or three large creeks, and of one of these we took advantage.

"We have no time to lose," I observed to my companion, "the fun will begin very soon."

"Oh! but," he remonstrated, "supposing we should be a little late now, we could come up again for the morning flight, would not that do as well?"

I told him it would not, as, for some motive, the birds there generally fly low in the evening, and fly high in the morning, so that there is then nothing to be done. The shooters about Rye share my opinion, and not one of them, hardly, attends for morning flighting.

Presently, I observed a "line" of ducks, flying very low indeed, coming over, straight from the Kent Coast Guard station. We both, and the dog, squatted so simultaneously that we could not help laughing.

"Now," I said, "when the birds pitch, you go one way round to them, I will go the other; but be careful not to tread on the pebbles; if you do they will hear you 300 yards away, and will be off before you get any nearer."

We watched the flock so intently that our eyes actually filled with tears. It was freezing so hard that my moustaches were on each side of my face a lump of icicles, and my companion's nose was as red as a beacon.

"Hush! Here they come!"

And down they go! Now for a stalk!

"See that pool," and I pointed it out to him; "they are there, behind the bank. Now go ahead, and I will go round to them."

We separated accordingly, but I soon perceived that he was not up to the move. He floundered about, backed out when his feet got wet, and finally he went back, disgusted, towards the shore. I pursued my way, feeling more confident of success, now that I was left alone to carry out the undertaking. Down into hidden holes, sliding into the mud, floundering into the slimy bogs, and climbing out again, wet up to my thighs, but getting nearer and nearer, I went on, with the old dog in close attendance, stepping demurely on my heels, his ears cocked up with excitement, for he was aware that a shot was at hand. The shades of evening seemed to increase, but the moon had risen, and I felt I would have sport. Now I am on the other side of the bank, behind which the ducks ought to be disporting themselves. Unfortunately there is no grass on the top of those high banks. They are all pebbles and large stones, stuck together by the snow, and hardened by frost. By my bearings, taken rightly, I was bound to be opposite the birds, therefore, so far, all was right. But should I attempt further stalking, the noise of my boots on the stones would betray me. Have I then gone so far, and toiled so hard, and got so wet, to be foiled at last? Not if I know it! I place the gun on the ground, and hurriedly unbuckle my boots. In a twinkling I stand in my socks. I take up the gun, crawl up the bank, making no more noise than a cat would have done, and if ever ducks have been astonished, these were. I seemed to turn up as close to them as if I had been kept there, bottled up, in the ground. With the first shot I nail three, as they flutter and splash over the water, previous to taking to flight, and two more fall down to the second barrel, whilst I see a third wavering, and finally coming down, near one of the bridges, and a fourth, which I had noticed had been hit by the first barrel, towers a considerable way off, and falls down, head first. I pick up some of the birds, Diver fetches those in the water, I string the lot quickly to my belt, and we go towards the spot where I had seen the last bird fall. I sent the dog round about, he soon scented the duck, and found it among a lot of rubbish, quite dead. Then back to the bridge, where I had seen the wounded one pitch, and where my friend was already looking for it. The night had set in then, but the moon shone most brilliantly.

"I saw the bird coming down here," said my companion, "but

although I came at once to the spot, I could not see him anywhere."

I called upon Diver to perform his duty, and we went along swiftly. There was a small buoy about eighty yards off, and I thought it might have been the bird, swimming against the tide, but when I sent the dog to it, he came back again, as soon as he got scent.

"The bird," I said to my friend, "must be in the creek, past the bridge. You go on one shore. I will take the other. Between us and the dog, the bird must be found."

I had not taken the trouble, as yet, to re-buckle my boots, and as I nearly lost one then, I had to stop.

"Hold on a moment!" I called out, when splash! splash! splash! went my duck, skimming from under the grass, under my feet, across the creek. Boom! and he was a dead bird that time. Diver went over, brought him back, and that concluded our sport for the evening.

Whilst walking along the sea-wall, back to Rye, several flocks of sandpipers came by us, and we nailed a dozen or so, though we might have killed more, but I hardly thought it worth our while and the dog's trouble to fetch them.

The ferryman, whose name is Cook, was watching for us, and brought us over in a jiffy.

A good supper, a rest, and a fine fire soon restored our tired system, and we went to bed at a very early hour, as we wanted to be up betimes.

The next day was ushered in bright and frosty. We were up at six, and over the ferry at seven.

I have rarely seen such lots of fieldfares as were then passing over the river in flocks to feed in the meadows on our side. I again went to the ditch I had been at the day before; but only found two seagulls basking in the ditch, and I did not fire at them. The tide was coming in then, and as I did not know whether it would overflow the salt marshes or not, I intimated to my friend that he had better not stray about.

We went on towards the harbour, but barring one shot at lapwings, and one at a lot of fieldfares, whose numbers seemed to increase as the day wore on, we met nothing worthy of note until reaching the expanse of mud and sands which my friend had declined to explore alone the day before. I caught sight of a bird squatting close to a pool left by the tide, evidently, by its outline, belonging to the duck tribe.

"It is odd it does not move," I said; "it must be a wounded bird."

And so it was—a duck, badly wounded; it could not fly, and Diver soon laid hold of it and brought it to me. Another flock of lapwings after that, came from over the downs, where someone had fired at them. They swooped down, and flew along the edge of the sand-hill. We started at a run towards the downs, when the birds passed over our heads, about forty yards high, and our four barrels brought seven down.

There is nothing like a heavy gun for that sort of fun, and these 10-bores of Tolley's are certainly very good killers. Mine is but a fifteen-guinea gun, but I have not yet seen anything of its size to beat it, either in style or performance. Nothing is more disheartening to a shooter than to have a flock of birds passing a little high, which his gun cannot reach and bring down. Hence my advice to all intending wildfowl shooters: "Always use a gun of as large a bore as is compatible with your strength."

After picking up our birds we walked the shore for some distance before we could see anything fit to shoot at, but towards eleven o'clock the tide was high, all oxbirds and sandpipers had to take refuge on the sands at the foot of the downs, and were easily reached by the 10-bore cartridges, so that we had some sport there. But oxbirds, sandpipers, and fieldfares are poor sport, after all, and I voted we should go again into the marsh.

Of all curious harbours, Rye Old Harbour is the most curious, and certainly one of the most unsafe. Its navigable channel is so narrow that none but small ships can come up, and then it must be at high-tide. There is only a tug (or two) kept for the harbour service, and the line of navigation from the harbour to the town is marked in the most primitive style by a series of long perches stuck into the mud, along the deep part of the channel, and at the top of each of these perches a bunch of brushwood is fastened, so that the "line of march" seems to be between a row of broomsticks. There is a fort built close to the harbour, but I doubt very much whether an enemy would be foolish enough to venture ships in such a place, where there is no water, a dangerous lee shore, and nothing to be gained by going there. We spent the whole afternoon in the marsh, but merely bagged three teal and a stray duck.

At night, when the flight began, we counted over 200 birds, but only five were killed, three by ourselves, one by a soldier attached to the fort, I think, and the fifth, which had been wounded, was killed in the harbour, where the men hunted it down in their dingies, and succeeded in knocking it on the head with an oar.

Now, all considered, we ought to have met with better sport,

and in years past, the place used to abound with fowl; but, of course, if two or three men are always at it with their guns, that is enough to keep the fowl away. When once the flocks have been fired at, they fly high, and give the hint to their followers. I have shot there five years ago, ten ducks in a single evening flight, with a shoulder-gun, and I cannot call that bad fun; but now I understand that our luck on our first evening was quite the exception and not the rule, as it ought to be.

However, we two enjoyed ourselves amazingly, and any man who is not too greedy will be pleased with the sport there. The accommodation at the hotels at Rye is very good, the ground for shooting is safe, and the sport moderately fair. The snow, unfortunately, was not so thick down there as it was nearer town; had it been otherwise, the marshes would have afforded good sport to us, in spite of all drawbacks.

For those who like shooting from boats, when the weather and tide suit, Cook, the ferryman, any day, will take shooters into the bay, or along the harbour, just as the fowlers prefer; but owing to having been once caught in a gale when in the bay, and having experienced the greatest difficulty in fetching the harbour again, the worthy ferryman is rather careful now in selecting the time, tide, and weather for such expeditions. At any rate, he may be trusted, and he is an honest hardworking man, deserving of all the patronage in the shooters' power to bestow.

January, 1875.

CHAPTER IX.

CHICHESTER HARBOUR.

CHICHESTER HARBOUR proper, notwithstanding its name, is not situated at Chichester; it stands at some ten miles from the good old-fashioned town. I do not reckon those miles by road, *viâ* which, I daresay, the distance is shorter, but *viâ* the shore (for the tide comes up a long, tortuously-winding estuary to within a short distance of the town), and it is along the shore of this estuary that I have roughly reckoned the distance I have stated.

The harbour itself is one of our crack spots for wildfowl shooting, and the marsh, at low-tide, along the whole length of the estuary, affords always some sport to those who prefer walking to shooting from boats or punts. There is, however, some bother with that walking, for one has to wear mud-shoes on the flats, the ooze being treacherous in some considerable stretches of the marsh, and it would not be safe to venture thereon without them. At high-tide, along the bank, one may pick up a few good shots too; but be careful to bring a clever retrieving dog with you if you wish to collect your spoils, and do not yourself venture any distance in the shallows, for you may suddenly come upon "a soft," and go down instanter up to your thighs.

There are three ways of doing justice to the wildfowl shooting at Chichester.

The first would be to begin sport as close to the town as possible—say at the landing-wharf, about a mile down the estuary, from whence one may walk down the shore as far as the harbour. This would give a chance of picking up a cripple or two that always escape from the night punters; and along the thick hedges, when the snow is on the ground, there are thrushes, redwings, fieldfares, and starlings to be had for the shooting, and, not uncommonly, partridges are flushed too, though I do not advocate the shooting of the latter by strangers. A good marsh-hunting

dog is indispensable, not only for the retrieving, but also because there are reeds, tall rank grass, and a sprinkling of oozy and grassy spots, where a duck may hide itself when wounded. Along the sea-wall the ground is very wet, but not treacherous. A good pair of lace-up boots reaching to the calf are about the thing, but if you wish to go on the flats a higher pair will be a necessity. Above all, when venturing near the water's edge, or along the creeks at low-tide, be sure to rig on your mud-shoes.

Concerning the latter, there are mud-shoes and mud-shoes. Fishermen's mud-shoes are not uncommonly made of two-inch-thick boards, nearly half a yard square for each foot, and weighing nearly 10lb. each. These are, certainly, substantial, and not likely to give way, unless a horse or an elephant were shod with them; but as neither horses nor elephants have need to use them, elephants' sizes had better be discarded. I have found that a frame made of thick strips of strong and sound lath, securely screwed together crosswise, and fitted with proper straps, in the style of skating straps, is about the best kind of thing for the purpose. They are very light, not brittle, and afford a perfectly secure footing.

Never rig on mud-pattens unless they are in thorough working order. I have oft, in my hurry, gone on, regardless of that essential, but it has always played me nasty tricks, and I am now more careful. Mud-shoes are, if anything, more important than the gun, for if the gun be out of order you cannot shoot, that is all; but if your mud-shoes give way at a critical moment, why, the least that may happen to you may be a thorough flounder in the ooze, and if you do not keep your head clear, you will most likely lose your gun, and, worse still, lose your life.

Well, concerning the Chichester estuary, fair-weather shooters, by keeping along the sea-bank will find plenty of popping congenial to their tastes, small birds being there in perfect shoals. Shooters who prefer more serious work will do best to drive either to Itchin (or Hitchen, or Atchen, for the name was thus spelt by three different people to me—the real name is Itchenor), or else to West Wittering, when they will enter into the more fowly part of the estuary. Finally, if they are regular punting men, they cannot do better than secure the services of one of the professionals, amongst whom the Moore family shine prominently. These men will, for a consideration, take you about to the pet grounds, especially if you interest them in the venture, by promising them extra pay for good sport, or letting them join in it. There are half-a-dozen good puntmen at Chichester Harbour, and all are beginning to do tolerably well, the late hard

weather having had the desirable effect of taming the fowl wonderfully. When the swivel-guns have been well fired, in the course of the night, the trouble of a morning visitation to the creek is always amply repaid by an abundant harvest of slight cripples, which afford the shore gunners an endless variety of shooting.

I had heard, the week before I went, very good accounts of the swivel-gunners' doings at the harbour, and I decided upon giving the place an inspection. Accordingly, one cold morning in December, I took the train for Chichester. As we proceeded, snowdrifts increased in size at every station, the snow fell during part of the journey. This, joined to a bitterly cold wind, promised well for the next morning flight, which I had made up my mind to attend. I was alone for this expedition, my only help being my old dog Diver, but he is a host in himself, and few birds escape him, though I am sorry to say his rheumatisms begin to increase to rather an alarming extent.

I arrived in due course at Chichester, and had a couple of Sussex mutton-chops to revive human nature, and forthwith I set about for the long drive to the harbour. It was pitch dark, and long past flight time when I got there, so I went to bed, but at 5 A.M. I was out.

B-r-r-r-r! how cold and uninviting it was! The snow covered the plain and the fields, the ground was as hard as a rock, the tide just up, the wind middling, the air clear, and altogether it was not a bad flighting morning.

As I was afraid to break my neck, I refrained from a long walk, but merely picking out a spot in the bank, which appeared to me suitable, I ensconced myself therein, under shelter of the wall. I put down my game-bag for Diver to curl himself on, in a nice dry hole, and sat down, with my head on a level with the top of the bank, watching towards the marsh. Several punt-guns were fired at intervals, then dawn of day appeared faintly, and flight began.

A bunch of widgeons passed rather high and very swiftly; I fired at them, nevertheless, but did not get any.

Three ducks next came, and of these I bagged one. He fell into the sea, and the dog brought him up, after a long chase. Whilst this was going on, I saw two teal rising from midstream, about 400 yards from me, and I watched them in the teeth of the breeze until the tears ran down my cheeks, from my anxiety not to shut my "peepers," and lose sight of the birds. Finally, after a mile circling, they turned back towards the harbour, and then popped down into a creek. It was about a quarter to eight then, and the light was quite sufficient for all purposes, so I

started for the stalk. Before I had advanced fifty yards, up got the birds once more; I squat, Diver downcharges; the birds, seeing nothing alarming, pitch a little higher up in a deeper and larger creek, where I feel pretty confident of nailing them; but when I get there, the teal are nowhere to be seen. I observe that, farther on, the creek gets still deeper, and at a place where the banks are fully a yard high I am sanguine to find the birds. In order to surprise them I walk round, and coming suddenly to the spot, up they go, and a rattling right and left, from Tolley's double 10-bore, nails both birds, quite dead. Thereupon Diver goes in, swims over, and whilst looking on I see a larger bird running towards the bank. A cripple! by all that is good. I start at full speed to cut off its retreat, but I have to go a very wide round, on account of the creek's numerous windings, and I lose sight of the bird. Nothing daunted, I run round, and climb on the bank, whence I watch my direct neighbourhood of swamp, and wait for the dog, who is bringing me one of the teal. I take it from him and he starts for the other one, but I call him back, and point out seaward across the mud:

"Hie on, Diver! Hie on! Lost bird!"

He looks on eagerly, and goes at once a wide circuit, under wind, and—yes, he has hit the track: he is greedily following it in the windings of a mere gutter of a pool, and flap! flap! flap! rises the bird, a few feet only from the ground, where it falls back again, whilst I, with finger on trigger, look on its evolutions. Broken-winged evidently, no use firing. Diver is standing still, looking at me.

"Go on! Pick him up!"

And, after a few seconds' splashing, he gets it, and brings it to hand. A fine widgeon, with only the tip of its off-wing broken.

This is the second bird I have "gleaned" this season, *i.e.* got without firing at. Evidently this one had been hit during the night, and had swum there for safety and rest, being unable to fly.

I then sent the dog to pick up the second teal, and went back to the harbour for luncheon, after which I devoted the rest of the day to an excursion round the bay with a boat.

In a meadow were several flocks of plovers, both golden and green, and observing a gunner creeping up to them along a hedge at the back of the field, I loaded with two cartridges No. 5 shot, placed two more handy before me, and awaited the result of his stalk. At last he reached a suitable spot, and fired a large single gun into the thick of the lot, bagging about a dozen. As I had expected, the flocks, after sundry evolutions, contrived to come

twice within range of me, when the first two barrels floored nine or ten, and the two next half-a-dozen. On hearing the first report, the man appeared quite as much astonished as the birds, for, as I had landed in a creek he could not conceive where the deuce I had come from.

There were many oxbirds, too, but I did not fire at them until we had gone right up the estuary, near West Wittering, when, finding nothing better, beyond red and green shanks, I, on the return journey, pitched into all that came by, and filled my bag very creditably; but, though I saw several flocks and companies on the wing, I did not get a shot at any large birds.

We stopped in the harbour (not far from a vessel which had some time ago run aground there), in the hope of bagging something during the evening flight. I had a crack at some widgeons, but did not get any, and that concluded the day's sport.

I was perfectly benumbed, and well I might be. I know nothing to tax more severely a man's constitution than exposure in an open boat to the evening's cutting wind and the murky atmosphere of a harbour in severe winter-time.

During the evening a punter dropped in at the inn, to offer birds for sale, and said they had made lately pretty fair averages, but that the coots and widgeon flocks at sea were giving them a lot of trouble.

"They are mighty wild, yet," he said, "but if this weather keeps on for a week or two longer, they will get a deal easier to reach, and a good job too."

I asked him if he thought a night's punting would prove any fun, but, as he could not guarantee me a shot with his swivel, I made up my mind not to go.

Now, in the morning, that same man, I was told, succeeded in cutting down nine or ten birds at one working. Had I known it beforehand, would not I have gone with him, that is all!

I was up early on Wednesday, making arrangements for walking back the whole way from the harbour to the town, of course shooting along the shore; and as the distance is rather more than ten miles (at least, it appeared so to me), the ground very soft, and the snow rather thick, I knew it would take me the best part of the day to accomplish my task.

Whilst I was having a substantial breakfast, as a foundation for the day's work, a sportsman turned up with several birds. He had been shooting farther south, near Selsea, and, from his account, had met with good sport, for, besides the birds in his pockets, he acknowledged missing half-a-dozen shots, and had wounded two ducks, but lost them, having no dog to retrieve them-

Soon after our confab we started. I had sent my birds away to Chichester the evening before by a carrier, so that I had nothing, as yet, to hamper my motions. My brother-knight-of-the-trigger wished me success, I returned the wish, and we parted at the road, when I turned towards the water, and he went along a country lane, where I heard him, soon after, popping at the redwings and fieldfares.

When I started the tide was on the ebb, and was half spent. This left some water in most of the creeks, so that it made the labour of inspecting them rather severe, as I had to come back on my own footsteps, after having gone along each of them in order to reach the bank; but, as the tide went still farther down, the creeks were mostly left empty, and I was soon enabled to cross most of them, readily enough, with my mud-shoes. The wind was blowing hard in my face all the way, and impeded my progress until I got to that part of the estuary which is protected by high hedges.

About half a mile from West Wittering, I had my first shot. It was at a mallard. I was walking along the bank, within fifty yards of a fair reed-bed, when I thought I heard a rustling noise amongst its withered stumps. I sent Diver to it, and he went in suddenly, flushing a wounded bird, which, fluttering energetically, would undoubtedly have managed to get himself blown out by the strong wind into mid-stream, where it would have been very doubtful if Diver would have mouthed him. Perceiving in time that the bird had still a lot of steam left in him, I thought it better to make sure, and so fired at him, and he dropped at the second barrel.

Several flocks appeared on the wing afterwards, but they all passed half a mile up in the sky. Then a heron came sailing down, and I shot him. Then a teal got up, fully a hundred yards away. I fired, but of course did not hit him. After that I shot at a flock of gray plovers, but the dog had a rare job collecting them, the wounded ones running like imps, and hiding in all sorts of holes, nooks, and corners. I daresay I lost half of them, in spite of our united exertions.

Higher up, near Birdham, a man who was arranging a sheep-fold in some turnips told me he knew a flock of ducks to be down in a marsh, inland, but this being a soft-water marsh, and, of course, as such, preserved, I did not go to them.

At Birdham I had a well-deserved lunch and rest, and at one o'clock went again on my way.

Between West Itchenor and Appledram, are good strong hedges, whose banks are full of rabbit-holes, and the snow

showed clear signs of both hares and bunnies. Diver, thereupon, expressed a lively wish to investigate the said hedges, and for some little time would not be denied, but as he found and flushed a covey of partridges within ten yards of me, and I had no wish to kill, or even disturb another man's birds, not only did I decline firing, but called the dog back, and sent him in the marsh. Two or three minutes after, there being constantly over my head and on all sides of me a multitude of small birds, I was paying no attention to what was going on there, but hearing a well-uttered "tchick" I shouldered the gun, looked up, and knocked over a snipe that had evidently risen from the other side of the bank. Thereupon a man called out to me that he knew of a hare in her form, close by, but I declined his offer to go and look for it, much to his disgust.

At Appledram I was glad to rest awhile, but as the evening was drawing near, lost no time there. I had had two shots at plovers, and one at oxbirds before reaching the lock. The canal was completely frozen over, and the old lock-keeper seemed near sharing the same fate, and, to tell the truth, everything looked very forlorn. Howbeit, putting my best foot foremost, I trudged along the shore with a will, and arrived at the wharf at dusk, just as the tide was once more rapidly covering the flats. I fortunately fell in on the road with a gentleman with whom I had become slightly acquainted at the harbour, and he gave me a lift to Chichester in his little trap. I was very tired, hungry, and wet, but a good dinner, a change of lower garments, and a good glass, soon set me to rights, and by nine o'clock P.M. I was back again at London Bridge Station, much pleased with my excursion.

January, 1875.

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTCHURCH BAY AND HARBOUR.

CHRISTCHURCH stands some mile and a half, or two miles perhaps, from the sea-shore, and almost the whole interval, between the town and the sea, is but a vast sheet of water at high-tide, or water and muddy flats at low-water.

The sea-shore is very open at the entrance to the harbour, where a long and narrow slip of a sand-bank runs from the high cliffs which stand opposite Stanford, right down to Mudeford. This bank is parallel to the shore proper, and between the two runs the tide, the opening being somewhere about eighty or a hundred yards wide at the narrowest part.

The spot is particularly quiet, there being very few local shooters, except the Sandford puntmen, two or three in number, and such men, as everybody knows, do not usually waste their powder and shot in day-time, and on single birds. The sea-shore proper is rather abrupt, standing almost perpendicularly from the water's edge up to an altitude which varies from twenty feet to a hundred, and more, as one walks farther down Mudeford way, but the sand-bank itself offers no impediment whatever to shooters, for its many undulations of ground afford to the sportsmen means for overreaching the birds, and along its shore thick rank grass grows to some height, and affords ample shelter to the gunners. At high-tide this sand-bank is always dry, so that there is no fear of being caught in a trap there, and one may shoot over it to one's heart's content. There are oxbirds, pipers, green and red shanks, green-plovers, and other small birds feeding thereon, and they are easily stalked if one takes advantage of the irregularities of the ground. The best plan for those who do not care about such small birds is either to hide in one of the tallest bushes of rank grass and watch for the large birds as they fly up and down in day-time, or else do as we did, go early in the

morning and evening, and take a stand-point at the mouth of the harbour, within a quarter of a mile from Stanford. The birds at feeding and flight time come over the bar, and if you are well hidden, and know what you are about, you are bound to have some sport, particularly if the weather be at all severe. I went there during the frost, and although the puntsmen did but indifferently, I got on middling well, and was satisfied.

The Hampshire coast has always been noted for its wildfowl shooting, and there are few estuaries in it where sport cannot be had by those who set about it in the right way.

The railway line that runs down to Christchurch runs also to Bournemouth. The latter, however, has nothing to recommend it to a wildfowl shooter. It possesses very high cliffs, from which visitors get splendid views of the sea and of the Point opposite Poole, some ten miles off, round Poole Harbour; but a wildfowl shooter cares not for heights, except when a very abundant passage takes place along the coast, and then you may chance accidentally to be present and make a good bag.

The sands from the cliff, opposite Stanford, down to Bournemouth, and farther down, even to the entrance to Poole Harbour are good, and moderately soft at low-tide, but they never yield any sport worth mentioning, except at the beginning of the season, when young broods are taking their first flights, and are either so tired by their first journeys, or so innocent as regards the use of the gun, that I have then mostly managed to get well within shooting distance of their companies. I need not say that at the time of my trip (January, 1875), the season was far too advanced to do anything of that kind. A few months' knocking about teaches the birds wisdom, and they soon come to look upon a gun, or anything like it, with such a wholesome dread, that it is rare indeed, except by a fluke, that you can manage to get near enough to do any execution. Anyone going down there, therefore, will do well to eschew the sands, except the sand-bar I have mentioned towards Mudeford, and to confine their attentions to the bay.

The journey, from Waterloo, takes four hours or so; change at Ringwood for the local trains running to Christchurch. This latter local line runs on such low ground that one seems travelling literally through a swamp, at times. Christchurch itself is a long, queer, twisting-streeted, straggling town, with but few attractions. The family hotel is a fair one of its stamp, the accommodation being comfortable and charges reasonable. The hotel 'bus meets all the trains, and goes also to Mudeford with parties; there are also post horses kept at the hotel stables, so that there is absolutely

no inconvenience to be encountered. On a Monday in the afternoon, at three o'clock, the train duly landed me and my friend Tom at Christchurch. We had a square meal, after which we set out for the harbour, where a puntman and boatman, to whom I had written, informing him of our arrival, was waiting for us. The news he gave was not very cheering. They had had, he said, no sport with the swivels, the weather being by far too mild, but there was a likelihood that our heavy shoulder-guns would do some scaring, at any rate.

We stepped into his boat, and off we went. The weather was simply beautiful. It was about 4.30 P.M., evening was drawing near, and a quarter moon was making its appearance. The tide was rising, and already covered well-nigh half the flats and marshes, as we passed Stanford. There, on the beach, were half a-dozen punts drawn up, and as many open boats, but only two or three men from the cottages were astir. We passed a puntman who was going inland for a flight, but although he was hard plied by our own man with insidious questions, tending to find out his favourite spot, the fellow evaded answering directly to his inquiries, and we left him. We landed on the cliff side, but just at the corner. I hid in a great bunch of reeds and tall grass, my friend squatted ditto, fifty yards from me, and the boatman moored his punt in the tideway, and so we awaited the flight.

There were a good many black ducks about, and they kept us continually on the *qui vive*. At last one came our way, and with its long neck out, looked like a black cross flying long end foremost. On it came, its belly hanging about a yard above the water. It went straight for the boatman, who aimed at it with a deliberation that did credit to his patience. Finally, he pulled trigger, and the duck, severely hit, turned towards my friend, who finished him off.

"Is he quite dead?" asked the man.

"Yes," replied my friend.

"All right, then, we will pick him up by-and-by; we can't lose him, and the birds will be coming directly."

And they did come.

Two ducks passed on my left; I fired at both, but only one, wounded, came down with a broken tip of his off-wing. He managed to break his fall so as not to stun himself, and was no sooner landed than he ran to the water. Before I could reach him he was vigorously paddling away, and fearing lest he should dive and get lost, I fired and killed him outright. The tide brought him ashore.

Twilight then set in, and many birds passed, especially at the last moment, but all too high, except one, a teal, which came alone in all his glory, and fell a victim to my companion's gun. Total, for the time being, a duck, a teal, and a black-duck for the three guns—poor work!

The moon was then shining brilliantly, and a lot of birds being on the call, we went down towards Mudeford, and whilst on the sand-bank I saw faintly a small company of black-ducks coming our way; I hid at once, and my two companions, who were behind me, did the same on losing sight of me, so that the birds came on unsuspectingly. Flop! down they went, on the left, between the shore and the bank. I looked up quietly. They were just in the middle of the narrow reach, but out of range. I wished somebody had been on the other side to drive them over to me. Finally, I made up my mind to try to stalk them, and by crawling from hole to hole expected to succeed; but it was not to be. Either they saw me or heard me, or something frightened them; but they rose nine birds all told, and passed above head between my friend and the boatman. The boatman fired his six-foot instrument into the brown (or rather the black) of them; Tom rattled away, right and left, in the same direction, but, for aught I know to the contrary, the said birds may be still flying. Rough language on the boatman's part, and unparliamentary expressions from Tom's lips, followed their disappearance. Both reloaded, and we divided the sand-bank between us, walking in a line towards the Castle. I was on the sea side, Tom walked in the middle, the boatman followed the creek.

About 200 yards farther I banged at a flock of oxbirds; thereupon boom! came from the man's *fusil de rampart*, and—

"Gentlemen!" called he, in great trepidation, "quick! quick! or we shall lose him."

Tom ran to the rescue, for the worthy boatman could not have loaded in time, and nailed a coot, which, it turned out, the boatman had fired at, as it stood near the bank, and missed. It had been wounded several days previously, by a swivel-shot, likely enough, for one of its wing-bones was completely broken, and the tip quite rotten. It was as lean as a lath, and miserably starved and poor.

After a good hour's tramp on the shore, we turned back and embarked once more in the old tub. It was quite high-tide, and the expanse of water was perfectly bewildering. We saw several birds, but did not fire, they being too far off, and we heard no gun, but once, but that was a whopper, and no mistake! The night was so quiet that the boom sounded to our ears as though the man

had been within a couple of hundred yards, whereas, most likely he was a mile away.

Home we went, but we arranged a similar expedition for the morning flight, and also made up our minds to have a tramp over the sands to Bournemouth. This last enterprise was a rash undertaking, as events subsequently proved.

Well, in the morning, at half-past five, we breakfasted, and at a quarter-past six were at the trysting-place, but no boatman was visible. He had overslept himself, we thought, and we were going towards his cottage, when bang! was heard behind us. We could see nothing for some time, when my friend said—

"I see him, it is our man."

He came up running, and apologised for having kept us waiting, but he had gone to look over a creek in the marsh, and had shot a teal, which he took out of his pocket.

We jumped into his craft, and shoved off. We had not gone more than a quarter of a mile when, from the bows, where I had taken my seat, I saw a suspicious-looking dark strip floating in the harbour, about 200 yards on our port side.

"Sam," I said, in a whisper, "there is a company ahead of us."

"So it is!" said he, "we must try to get to them."

We hid at the bottom of the boat, Sam only, with his curly cap, being allowed to peep out, and we drifted, broadside on, to the birds. A strong breeze was blowing, and, as the birds were heading it according to their wont, their heads were turned our way. Fortunately, the wind was blowing us not directly to them, but somewhat to their lee, and we could have got near them, as they evinced no uneasiness, but suddenly the boatman jumped up and fired, calling out—

"Fire away! Fire away! They are off! I thought they would not have waited for us long enough."

Howbeit, we did not fire, and he did not get any, and we had the mortification of seeing another company rising some hundred yards farther, which we might perhaps have got at, even supposing we had missed the first, had not our man fired so rashly.

We arrived at our flighting points in good time, and saw about fifty or sixty birds. We fired a dozen shots, but did not bag a single head. They all passed wide or high, and though we fired, we did so in sheer desperation, without any rational idea of bagging, as some of the birds fired at were preposterously far out of our reach. The wind increased to a gale, and by the time the tide was high the shore was covered with foam, flying all over the place. Now, as the sea reached then the foot of the cliffs, it was

out of the question to undertake our expedition to Bournemouth until it had somewhat receded. So we went respectively east and west of the marsh, agreeing to be at the cliff at nine or half-past. I went round Stanford and Mudeford; there I got ferried over by a jolly Coast Guard officer, who told me where I should see some divers. I did see them, certainly, but that was all, as they took good care to remain where they were, viz. half a mile from the shore. I rattled away at some plovers and redshanks, and finally turned back towards the cliff with seven or eight birds, no large ones. When I arrived at the cliff the tide had turned, and already two boys had turned up, looking for wreckage and *débris* amongst the seaweeds and refuse.

Tom then came up, and we held a consultation. I did not fancy our projected trip at all. The sea was wild, the wind dead on shore, and blowing a gale, occasionally covering the little sand that was visible with a sheet of foam, and this was not likely to improve the shore's attractive powers to birds. Howbeit, Tom would not be denied. He asserted that the sands were good, that birds were sure to be met with, that Bournemouth was only two miles from where we stood, and that a mutual friend would be waiting for us there, when we might enjoy ourselves, and have a good dinner.

The concluding argument influenced me more than all the others, for I was getting hungry, but what a "sell" our trip turned out to be! First of all, although the tide had turned for at least an hour, the waves came right up to the foot of the cliff all the same, being propelled there by the strong wind.

"We will walk over the cliffs and along the downs for awhile," urged Tom, "then the shore will be bare and all right."

I had my misgivings, and these were fully realised. Howbeit we climbed up, and when we got on the top were pretty nearly blown down again. In fact, the gale was so rough, that we were thankful when we had passed the Coast Guard flag-staff. About half-way to the next Coast Guard station we had another look at the shore, and as we could walk thereon then, we went down, but never shall I forget the misery. We were obliged to keep close to the cliff, and the sands were so soft that at each step, we sank in, a couple of inches. Everybody knows how hard it is to struggle over soft sands against a strong head-wind, and this was our predicament, all the way. Cliff after cliff, and point after point, did we struggle past, and when we had walked two good hours we were hardly in sight of the Bournemouth wooden jetty. Fortunately we were then able to pick out a harder line of journey, as the tide retired, still we were quite blown by the time we reached Bourne-

mouth. I am sure those three miles in the soft sands, with a gale in our teeth, were equivalent to fifteen miles on a road with no wind to contend against.

As regards sport, we had only one shot, and that was at a duck. He was flying along the coast, against the wind, and, therefore, coming towards us behind our backs. I caught sight of him when glancing round in one of my usual turns of inspection, and we hid at once behind a cliff. On he came, then he veered towards the cliff, and we lost sight of him.

"He is gone!" I was saying to Tom, when lo! he appeared right above our heads on a line with the cliff. We fired simultaneously, and, to this day, we don't know who shot it. We got him, at any rate.

Well, that was all we saw on that long and arduous tramp. Neither did we meet anybody, except a little boy acting as cowherd on the downs. There was not a sail to be seen in the offing, and not a single bird on the sands; altogether it was a most dreary affair. The day was cloudy, too, and rain came down most of the way in a kind of unpleasant mist. As for the wind, it blew so hard at times as to literally take our breath away, and it was certainly hard to pull against it with our long coats on, reaching down to our knees.

However, when we were within half a mile of the town the weather cleared up a bit, though the sun did not come out, and some children, with their governesses and nurses, made their appearance with the usual sand-buckets, spades, &c. Farther on, visitors were promenading, riding, and driving; it looked uncommonly as though we were in summer-time instead of winter. At least twenty young ladies, too, came riding by, accompanied by two or three horsemen, so that we found the beach rather more lively than we expected. Evidently Bournemouth keeps her visitors at all times, on account of her justly-reputed mild climate. Still, it is a rather peculiar-looking place, owing to the queer spots whereon some of its fine houses are built, and, moreover, I do not believe that half-a-dozen of the said houses are built on the same level. It is all up and down, but mostly up, and on every pinnacle a house is built.

Well, we had luncheon with our friend at the hotel, and wanted it badly, for our morning's exertions had been unusually severe, and anyone who wishes for an appetite has only to go to Christchurch, rise at 5 A.M., walk to Mudeford, cross over, and toddle on to Bournemouth, along the sands, at high-tide, and I warrant he will be hungry then, as well as tired. After dinner we made tracks towards the railway station. This station is, like most buildings

of its kind, a good mile farther away than it ought to be, and I pity those who, being in a hurry, and unable to get a fly, have to walk the whole distance, for it is all uphill work and no breathing.

We booked ourselves to Christchurch, where we arrived in good time for a parting shy at the fowl, and we fired at small shore-birds the remainder of our cartridges. Then we got into the old 'bus, and at ten o'clock were back again at Waterloo, all the better for our trip.

I should advise intending visitors to Christchurch to bide their time; wildfowl are not to be got whenever you wish to get them. You must wait for their coming; patiently delay until frost, snow, and great storms, happen to occur; then take the train down, and you will find the bay and harbour perfectly alive with birds. If you wish to be thoroughly on the spot, take up your quarters at Mudeford; then you can go out at all times without inconvenience, and if anything turns up, from the beach you can see it, and make up your mind accordingly.

January, 1875.

CHAPTER XI.

POOLE HARBOUR AND BAY.

Poole, from time out of mind, has been the headquarters for wildfowling on the south coast.

Everybody there seems to own a punt or a boat, as well as a swivel-gun or shoulder-gun, or two, of good length and large bore; in fact, fowling appears to be, and is still, the staple fun in the place.

Nevertheless, of late, the sport seems to have considerably abated of its pretensions. The reason for this is sufficiently obvious. Until a few years ago, when the harbour was still in its prime, such a number of men took professionally to wildfowling that there was not a standing-point on shore, nor a creek amongst the flats, that was not occupied by anxious gunners. Night and day, without ceasing, the popping was kept up. Under such a state of things it was impossible that the fowl should continue to come in multitudes to such inhospitable shores, and they shifted their quarters. It will be some time, too, before the harbour will reassume its importance in that respect. Howbeit, the evil worked its own remedy. When, latterly, the majority of the men found that there was nothing to shoot, they had to give up the attempt of making their regular winter living out of it, and now the number of professionals is considerably reduced.

Still, although the flats are now much quieter, they do not yield a tithe of the sport they used to afford, and there is still a good deal of popping going on, as I had ample testimony during my three days' stay in the place. I went down one fine morning, and as soon as I arrived I went direct to the abode of my old chum, Red-headed Jack, as he is called by his intimate friends. Jack is a professional shooter and fisherman; he owns a Poole canoe, and is, with two other men, joint owner of a P. E. smack, the number of which I forget. The said smack is without cabin

or shelter of any kind, except two or three boards forward in the bows, under which you must creep, like a dog in his kennel, when rain comes down. Nevertheless, in spite of these drawbacks, I have ever enjoyed my trips in the old smack, and have always had sport in it. Jack is one of those fellows that will not be denied, and when he sets out for a fowling trip, fowl he will get somehow before coming back; and I have known him to stay away forty-eight hours at a stretch, rather than come home empty-handed.

When I called for him, his daughter said I should find him rigging out the punt. I went then to the "hard," and there came upon four or five young lads, among whom was Jack's younger brother, cleaning up the punt-gun with a billiard-cue.

"Hallo!" said he, when he spied me coming along, "good-morning, sir. You see I am at work here, getting things ship-shape. My brother is at the public-house. Shall I go and tell him you are here?"

"No, I will go myself," I said; "but, what in the name of goodness have you been up to?" for I noticed the ammunition-box open, and about a hundred yards away, stuck in the mud, was a suspicious-looking board facing the punt. It was low-tide, and the shore was, of course, high and dry.

At my remark, they all laughed, and the young fellow explained that yonder board was one of his brother's mud-shoes, and they had been firing the swivel-gun into it, to see how far it carried! Oh! if Jack had turned up there and then, would not he have warmed the youngsters, that is all.

Howbeit, he did not turn up, and as it was no matter to me I saw another similar experiment being carried out, and then went to the public-house in search of the puntman. Jack speedily came forward, and we proceeded to the boat. This time the young fellows had brought the unfortunate mud-shoe forty yards nearer, as a target for a large-bore shoulder-gun, and you may imagine Jack's explosion when he made out what they were doing. He soon put a stop to any further experiments by summarily boxing one of the youngsters' ears, and this had the effect of scattering the others.

The young brother, meanwhile, seeing how matters were likely to turn, had set himself to work industriously, spreading straw at the bottom of the punt, arranging the swivel, and putting the "cripple"-gun under the side deck. These Poole punts are fitted with a forward deck, over which works the swivel-gun on its wooden rest; and along the sides, four or five inches of decking are carried round, and the inside border is raised up, so as to keep the water

out, if the wind should blow somewhat stiff and the waves should come a little higher than was desirable. The swivel-gun's rest is moved about on deck with a stick fixed into it like a handle, and the gun's breech is securely fastened to the bows by a strong piece of cord, which deadens the recoil, and makes the punt bear the brunt of the jar. Altogether, then, the muzzle of the gun does not appear more than a few inches past the bows, and although the gun is worked on that kind of deck which covers the fore-part of the punt, its "rest" prevents it from getting wet, when a wave breaks over the bows or the sides.

Jack's swivel-gun carries twelve ounces of shot, and is about, stock and all, six feet long. It is, notwithstanding its small load, a very hard-driving gun, and when a good flock receives its contents into its ranks, great is the damage done. Jack's cripple-gun is a double muzzle-loader 16-bore, which he loads with his coarse "ducking," just as if it were a punt-gun. He owns, besides, two large-bore shoulder-guns, and I had brought down a 4-bore flock-gun and my double Tolley 10-bore.

"This is what we will do," said Jack to me, when he had sent his brother to the station to fetch my guns and traps, "we will take all the guns, and start early in the afternoon. The tide won't be right up till eight this evening, but we will 'do' several creeks with our shoulder-guns, and may be when coming home we may want the swivel as well, but that is doubtful."

And so it was settled.

We started at 4 P.M. I squatted in the stern, smoking a cigar, whilst Jack plied his paddles, and we went along in good style, in spite of the tide. However, for aught I know, it was after all a hard pull, and when a tug came up to us, tugging a brig along, Jack called out to a boatman who was riding astern of the brig, in his boat, and throwing our painter over to him he made us fast, and we went along in still grander style.

The weather was bitterly cold, and the wind had been rather boisterous of late, but it had abated considerably in the course of the day, and had it not been that it blew now against the "flow" the harbour would have been almost without a ripple.

Well, on we went, past a queer windmill concern on our starboard side, then farther on, past the old wharf, and then indeed the prospect changed. Instead of the picturesque landscape, which previously hemmed us in, we were now in the midst of the vast muddy Poole flats, extending uninterruptedly for miles around us.

Evening began to set in. Already, behind us, the town had lighted up, and the trains, as they ran along the last new line from

New Poole to Bournemouth, Christchurch, &c., glowed along the bank like fire-spitting snakes. We had left our tug, and she had forged ahead. We had stopped our smoking, and got to look out, as we dropped into a creek, wherein the rising tide urged us onwards.

"How far does your 4 bore carry?" presently whispered Jack, as we lay at full length, side by side, in the punt, after he had reconnoitred.

"One hundred yards for certain, but in a flock it will kill at 120 yards."

"Good!" said he; "then, master, I will bring you up to a company on a piece of flat, that my shoulder-guns cannot reach."

"Why? cannot you work round to them, near enough?"

"No; they stand a good way off, from any water deep enough to float my punt."

"All right; then we will try."

"A flock is about 200 yards from us now," said he, listening; "I can hear them coming. Squat, here they come!"

And we crouched in silence, whilst the host swept over our heads, at a tremendous height. Then Jack resumed his "shoves," and we went on quietly towards the head of the creek. A lot of single birds were about, for the evening flight was taking place, but it was not worth our while watching them, as my companion knew we could have better sport, if we were only patient enough.

When we reached the place, I could hear some birds plain enough, but they appeared to me, judging by the sound, to be at least 200 yards away. Whilst waiting, another flock swept over us, and quite low. I peeped up above the bank, but all was pitch dark. I felt certain that the last flock had settled close to us, certainly within a hundred yards, but where? The French say that at night all cats are gray (*la nuit, tous les chats sont gris*); I can safely say, as regards wildfowl on seaweeds, that at night all duck tribes are black. The moon was under a lot of thick clouds, worse luck! and would not lighten up the scene; and there I was, on one knee, holding the gun ready, and peering over.

Whilst thus looking I saw an indefinable something move, and thereupon came a noise as though some birds were disagreeing. I instantly covered the spot, aimed then a little higher, and boom! I sent the contents of the 4-cartridge on their mission.

"You have hit some," exclaimed Jack, pulling ashore; "I heard at least one squeak like."

He hastily put on his mud-boards, and took with him my 10-bore to settle any birds that might have been wounded. I saw him stoop three times, and whilst coming back he fired and

stooped again, bringing altogether four birds—three widgeons and a coot.

"I say, master, that gun of yours does kick," remarked the puntman.

"Does it? I never noticed it."

"How do you load it?"

"Nearly half the cartridge full of powder, a moderately thick wad over that, the rest of the cartridge filled up with shot, and a thin wad creased over it; that is all."

"And quite enough too," he observed; "as for that 4-bore of yours, that was a good range just now, and when you don't care for that gun any longer, I shall be very happy to receive it from you, as a keepsake."

That was a high compliment to the gun from such a man, for he ought to know a good killing-gun when he sees one, after having shot for so many years.

However, I made him understand that the gun was likely to last me my lifetime, and that his chance of getting it was decidedly remote; and on we went, higher up, to try our luck in another creek. As we reached our place we found a punt moored therein, and had a near shave of being shot at, by its occupant. Fortunately the moon rose, and we escaped such a handsome reception.

Now, I have heard some men say that moonlight nights are unsuitable for wildfowl shooting. Perhaps it was so to them, because their dress, or appurtenances, were unsuitable for the pursuit of fowl by the light of the moon; but, *ne leur en déplaise*, a moonlight night is not only no impediment, but a positive advantage to the shooters, as it enables them to see the fowl more distinctly; and, strange to say, in most cases, the fowl exhibit an amount of confidence which a tyro would not expect to find, knowing their extreme constitutional shyness. I have seen, more than once, ducks not more than twenty or thirty yards from me that did not seem to notice me, although the moon was shining. I explain this apparent unconcern of the birds, when I was in a punt, by the fact that although I could plainly see the ducks by raising my head just above the level of the bank, yet, to the ducks, the top of my head alone was visible, and this, by acting very slowly and cautiously, does not startle them. Besides this theory of my own, I have heard another, which is not without its weight, viz. that the light of the moon inspires the birds with more confidence, as they think they can spy their enemies from afar, and therefore are not quite so timorous as usual. I have also heard that ducks see better in the dark than by daylight or moonlight; but as regards that, of course the ducks know best, and we can only conjecture

as to the probable state of the case. As for oxbirds, sandpipers, greenshanks, redshanks, &c., a cargo of them can always be shot by moonlight, as they are then so fearless as to come and settle within forty yards, or even nearer, of a gunman, if the ground suits them.

After we had left the puntman who wanted to riddle us, we went on to another place, nearer the mouth of the harbour. On our way there, we heard a flock of widgeons whistling. Jack dropped his paddles, seized a large gun, and faced the sea. I took the hint, and laid hold of the 4-bore. The small flock was coming very straight towards us, and I estimated their number at about a score. They, however, passed about a hundred yards on our left, and we banged into them the whole three flock-guns. Verdict from Jack: "Only one!"

As far as I am concerned, I felt convinced, at the time I fired, that the canoe gave a "slap" on to the waves, which caused me to shoot much below the birds, and I knew I had not been guilty of hitting any of them.

We rowed to the spot where the dead bird was bobbing up and down, and took him in. He was a fine bird, in prime condition, as indeed were those I had shot before, and it was a pity I had missed such a chance of nailing a few more. But then, such things will happen, and they do not put out my equanimity. If we were to bag at each shot, there would be no fun in shooting. At least, I fancy so. I imagine that the romance of shooting, precisely consists in missing occasionally, and bearing the event with composure.

The next shot we had was at a golden-eye.

We were drifting about aimlessly, on our return journey, in the hope of getting a shot with the swivel-gun, the tide being high, and no flats visible, except a long way off, close to shore, when Jack saw the bird, nudged me, and we looked out. He took his 16-bore gun, not wishing, I presume, to waste a load out of one of his big guns for a single bird; but there he found out his mistake, for he fired in vain, and the bird disappeared. Now, a diver, at all times, even in daylight, is not easy to circumvent, but at night the case is a hundred times worse, for even when the bird comes up, if you do not look extra sharp, you are apt to lose him. This nearly happened to us, and it took us a good twenty minutes to bag him, but it was very amusing, all the same. Sometimes the moon got behind a cloud, and we had to lay-to until it reappeared, for we were determined not to give up the bird. At last a lucky shot, at long range, hit him hard, and he remained on the top of the water, opening and shutting his beak, as these birds

invariably do when severely wounded. He did not even attempt to dive when we paddled to him, and we picked him up without further trouble.

After that we resumed our roving, and turned homewards once more. When we got to the old wooden wharf there was a brig there, on board of which Jack went, to get some matches. Whilst he was gone, I saw some birds going down on the water, some distance from me higher up, towards the Bournemouth side of the harbour, and when Jack reappeared I told him of their whereabouts; he primed anew the swivel, put a new cap on the nipple, and we went in chase. We nearly got within range, but the canoe gave a lurch, which rolled a gun against the side of the punt, and the birds declining to allow us to have a shy at them, they rose with a great noise, indignant I suppose at our intrusion.

I looked at my watch and found it was midnight! Fancy our having been eight hours on the water! How quickly time had gone by! I thought we had not been more than two or three hours, at the utmost. Well now, what was to be done?

"The morning shooting is the best," asseverated Jack; "it would be a pity to go home now; let us go into a creek and anchor there, until three or four o'clock; meanwhile, you know," he added, "we can watch for whatever birds may come our way."

Yes, our watching was very pretty watching, indeed! No sooner were we at anchor (in a deep creek, where there was always sufficient water to keep us afloat, even at low-tide) than we had a good supper, immediately after which, worthy Jack pulled up the collar of his overcoat, pulled down the flap of his cap over his ears, tied it deliberately under his chin, and, lying down at full length, with his head on the ammunition-box, and under the little deck, in two minutes he was snoring. I sat up smoking for about ten minutes, but soon tired of it, so I laid myself down too, wrapped a rug around me, popped my head under the gun deck, and, ripple! ripple! ripple!—the ripple of the wavelets, and the rocking of the canoe, lulled me very speedily into the land of dreams.

I woke up some two or three hours afterwards, and, fortunately, I recollected where I was, in time, and did not make any noise; but quietly uncovering my head, and getting it out from under the boarding, I peeped over the gun'le.

Jerusalem! What a sight! Am I awake, or still asleep? for I had been, just before, dreaming of most wonderful execution amongst all sorts of wildfowl, and did not feel quite sure then,

whether or no I was not seeing with the eyes of fancy—at least 200 birds are floating by, and drifting leisurely with the again coming-up tide! The swivel-gun is loaded, of course, but the canoe is turned the wrong way, the birds being astern of us. What is to be done? If I call up Jack, he will start, call out, kick up his heels, or do something of the sort, and farewell to the birds. I will wait until they have passed the bank, which presently they do, quite unsuspectingly. I then shake Jack, who mumbles in his sleep, and won't listen. I stop his mouth then with my hand; he gasps for breath, opens his eyes, and I whisper the case at issue into his ear. He sits up quickly, hauls up the anchor quietly hand over hand, swings the canoe round, cocks up the hammer of the swivel, and all the other guns being placed handy as well, he shoves us out.

There, sure enough, is the flock, about a hundred yards from us by that time. I take up the 4-bore, to make sure of something being done, in case the swivel cannot be fired before the birds rise, and with two or three good shoves we glide silently in the wake of the birds. The hindmost ones crowd on the leaders, the flock gets more compact, Jack sights up the long gun, whilst the birds look up distrustingly.

"Now, then!" he calls out loudly, and up they stretch their necks for flight, but before more than a dozen are fairly on the wing, the gun has been fired, and nine or ten birds remain, dead or fluttering on the waves. I bang also into the thick, Jack hastily fires his long singles, and we hear several birds going down, flop, on the mud.

Here was work for both of us.

"I will land at once and look for those that fell," said my companion; "you finish the cripples here, master."

He took his little gun with him, and fired twice, coming back with four birds, and announcing another, running off to the next creek, where we should be sure to find it.

Meanwhile I had blazed away at the swivel's cripples, and altogether we had thirteen birds, "a bad number," remarked Jack, but the other one he knew of consoled him, as it would make fourteen altogether.

Now, the whole affair had been a piece of good luck, indeed, as we might have been paddling all night, and not have met then with such success. Truly, *la fortune vient en dormant.*

Whilst we were near the bank we ran the punt on a flat, so as to be enabled to load the punt-gun in peace. It is always a great nuisance, that loading of long, heavy, muzzle-loading swivels; but then the value of the sport would not warrant a professional

puntman in investing a round sum in a breech-loading swivel-gun, although, to him, such an implement of warfare would prove a great boon. Years ago, though, when there were but few such professionals, and every "outing in the punt" was sure to be repaid by a handsome load of birds, as a return for the exposure and exertions of its occupant, it would undoubtedly have proved a profitable investment; but, now, it needs a man of talent in that line, together with the display of great patience and tact, to make even a muzzle-loader keep its master, and none but amateurs possess breech-loading swivel-guns.

We knocked about the whole morning, but saw very few more birds indeed, and had only another crack at a bunch of black-ducks, when but two were picked up.

We were home at 9.30 A.M., having been, altogether, seventeen hours and a half out in the punt. I was perfectly knocked up, and so was my companion. We had a substantial breakfast and "turned in for a spell of sleep," as Jack called it.

I intended going out again at night, but in the course of the evening squalls began to blow, rain pattered heavily, and that put a stop to our intended excursion. I arranged then to have a sail in the bay, early in the morning, and Jack went with one of his partners to get their smack out of the press of craft, ready for our start.

At four o'clock, A.M., against a strong "flow," we sailed out of harbour with a favourable stern wind, and soon the dim lights of both shipping and town disappeared in the morning mist. The punt was riding astern, as Jack intended to have a "go" in it, amongst the creeks, and he left us within a mile and a half of the old wooden pier. I was now left alone with Jack's partner, an old man, with a weather-beaten countenance and a keen gray eye, that gleamed under his sou'-wester with a thorough "sporting" light. He evidently enjoyed the fun as much as I did, and each shot was keenly relished.

We only met with stragglers, *i.e.* bunches of two or three birds, here and there; no flocks. The weather was too quiet, and too mild, for the multitudes to assemble together; but we had very good fun nevertheless, and, fortunately, enjoyed the most beautiful weather possible. True, the wind blew rather stiff, but the old boat behaved right well, and its joint owner managed it so handsomely that it was a perfect treat to be in her.

I went forward in the bows, facing the old boy, and from his directions I made ready, when needed; otherwise, squatting forward, I smoked the calumet of peace. I had rigged over the bulwark a couple of boards with sundry holes here and there,

through which I peeped cautiously when anything was ahead. Nothing makes you shoot so well as when you see yourself the whereabouts of the spot where the birds are; all the panto-mime, hints, and nods, and winks of your *confrère* only tend to puzzle you, whereas a single glance tells you how many birds there are approximately, their tactics, their position, straggling or compact, and you can, accordingly, make up your mind for the best plan of action.

For instance, we once passed between the members of a company which had divided themselves in two bands on our approach. I prepared for them, and saluted both starboard and port side with a volley, but had I not seen previously what the birds' next move was likely to be, I should have only fired at one set, and not even have looked for the other, for the old boy had not seen their tactics, and was only aware of our starboard birds.

Altogether, I bagged five birds that morning.

Now, I do not know whether other wildfowl shooters have made the following remark, but, of late years, I have noticed that the fowl seem to increase in wariness, season by season, and, certainly, nowadays, the ordinary shoulder-guns of years past would not pay for their ammunition. To get anything like a tolerable bag one needs to use guns carrying very large doses indeed, and had it not been for my 4-bore flock-gun, the chances were great that I should have come home empty-handed, or with very little to boast of.

I find my paper reaching a great length, and must now pull up. To those of my readers who wish to shoot at Poole Harbour, I will give my opinion, viz. there is some sport to be had there, but it requires a deal of doing, and none but very large guns need be taken, for the birds are wonderfully "acute," and the semblance of a gun frightens them out of their wits. Still, good guns, a good guide, and patience will go a long way, and with these I will wish my brother-shooters every success.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COLNE ESTUARY.

The snowstorms had done a good deal towards bringing the birds for shelter nearer the coast and into estuaries, and the accompanying sharp frosts having to a considerable extent put a stop to all inland feeding, the "flats" were well patronised, and the *élite* of the duck tribe and of the long-legged wading fraternity were there during my trip.

I therefore met with many birds in my two days' boating and rambles along and over the flats in the Colne Estuary, and, moreover, I brought home a couple of score of them.

The Colne is, at Colchester, only a twenty-yard wide stream, but a mile or so farther down it widens considerably, at least sufficiently so to allow barges and brigs to come up to the bridge at Hythe. As concerns sport, there is nothing to be done along that part of the stream which is comprised between the two bridges, *i.e.* Hythe bridge and the town bridge proper; but when once the shooter has passed Hythe bridge he may begin to look out, especially at low-tide and when the weather is hard, as it was during my visit.

On the first day, snow fell, in no inconsiderable quantity, for a good part of the day, and meanwhile the wind was rough and bitterly cold. Such a state of things had the very desirable effect of bringing the birds rather nearer the shore than was good for them, for there are always two or three gunners hanging about behind the banks, and any stray bird is sure to meet with a warm reception. Farther on the shores are perfectly quiet, there being few people about, at the best of times, and when the weather is rough there are still fewer passers-by. On the Saturday of my visit, for instance, I met only one man on my way between Hythe and Wivenhoe, and when I crossed over the ferry, I went as far as the Point opposite Brightlingsea, a distance of four miles, *sans*

rencontrer un chat. Now, I call this very jolly, for nothing makes you feel so sour as to see a lot of people about a shore where you intend shooting, because, of course, even if such visitors have no guns, their presence alone is sufficient to drive away any birds that otherwise you might have bagged.

I arrived at Colchester on a Friday evening, and slept there.

Early on Saturday I was on my way to the shore. I had arranged to drive to Hythe bridge, but the fly was so slow in making its appearance that I gave up waiting for it, and, shouldering my gun, called out Diver, my water-spaniel, and we made a start.

It was still dark, and a few flakes of snow were falling; it was freezing "considerable," as the Yankees say; altogether, it was a very fine wildfowling morning.

Up the hill we went, and then down to the river-side. We crossed the bridge near the Hythe station, turned to the right, and there we were along the shore. Daylight began then to appear, and as soon as I passed the shipping I slipped two cartridges in, and cocked the gun. The fields on my left were tenanted already by numerous large flocks of starlings, fieldfares, &c., and, as nothing else was to be seen, I made up my mind to pepper some of the flocks, *pour me tenir en haleine*, and to keep the dog warm. Accordingly, I floored a few birds, by way of practice, but when, half a mile from Hythe, I heard some redshanks whistling, I at once paid attention to the stream. The river is there about eighty yards wide, and, the coast being perfectly clear, I could fire any way I pleased without fear of hitting anybody.

Well, the shanks went up and down for some time, and at last settled on the opposite shore, and began feeding. The tide was low, and long banks of "soft" were lining the water on both sides. This, of course, would preclude all notion of picking up one's birds oneself, even if they had fallen on the right side of the stream; and I should advise my brother-knights-of-the-trigger never to undertake the Colne without a soft-mouthed retrieving dog, that does not mind going over several times, and retrieving well from the opposite bank. I have seen some retrieving dogs that were perfection in the field who, when brought wildfowling, blundered, refused, and played all sorts of tricks. Bear in mind that for such work all your pleasure and all your chances of success depend on your dog. For stream shooting a dog ought to be willing to go over half-a-dozen times after a shot, if need be, and he ought not to be a "fumbler"—*i.e.* a dog that mouths his bird, then puts it down and rolls it over and over with his nose—

for then, in the soft ooze, the birds get in a dreadful mess, and eventually the dog will not pick them up at all. A good dog ought to pick up and come back at once, without any fuss, and when on the tramp, he ought to keep to heel, and never move from that place until he has his orders.

Well, the shanks, with their customary caution, took good care not to give me a chance of surprising them, and they rose a hundred yards from me, when they swept over the stream. They were five, and at one time they closed together so compactly that I could not resist the temptation to fire. One was hit, fell on the water, fluttered energetically, and would have managed an escape, had not the dog been handy. Paw over paw, steadily went the old dog, and in spite of the bird's angry flutter he took it up and brought it to hand—first legitimate shot.

Happy thought—had I known that the birds could have thus been reached, I would have fired both barrels. Memento—do it next time.

On these wise thoughts I placed the bird in the net of my bag and went onwards. It was broad daylight then, the tide was just on the turn; I had, therefore, at least, a good two or three hours yet before me, ere the "softs" would be covered by the brine.

I then observed a large flock of curlews coming. At least eighty were together. I dropped behind the bank as soon as I spied them, and from thence kept watch on their evolutions. They swept over the opposite bank with wings perfectly motionless, and simultaneously they "called." Now, from their manner, I knew they intended feeding, and they settled, indeed, but on the other shore, worse luck! and the stream being at that spot at least a hundred yards wide, there was but little likelihood that I should nail any of them.

However, I marked their spot, and walked down along my bank until I came opposite the birds. The wind was blowing strongly at the time, and I felt certain, from my position, that they could not scent me; but, for some inexplicable motive, they went. I heard them "calling," and I knew they were off.

I went up the bank to see where they were going, and I had the mortification to see them disappear over the hill.

"No luck, Diver," I said to the old dog, when lo! with startled cries, up got three curlews from *my* side of the shore. I fired, knocked one over; fired the second barrel, and, to the best of my belief, hit another, but I did not see him fall.

Whilst the dog was retrieving the dead bird, five ducks came on in a line, and crossed the river, too high to be fired at. Behind them I observed another coming quite alone. I hid, and

he passed about eighty yards from me. Bang! He jumps up; bang again! he wheels round, flaps his wings, then spreads them to break his fall, and begins to come down, when, suddenly, all steam abandons him; he shuts his propellers, and falls head first, on the top of the bank, from whence he seems to roll into the ditch.

I go towards the spot, leisurely enough; but when I get there, can't see him. There were large and thick bushes about and reeds as well.

"Lost bird, Diver; lost bird!"

The dog sniffs audibly, and "draws" to my feet, where I perceive in a low bush the dead bird, caught in a root.

I was then near a village called Wivenhoe, and went into an inn for refreshments. The news I heard there was cheering, inasmuch as a good many birds had been shot by the puntmen in and about the harbour. A gentleman had, the day before, shot a "Holland goose," and when wildgeese come to an estuary, times are indeed hard outside, and one may reasonably expect ducks and waders to be fairly abundant.

At half-past ten I was off again; but, as I knew of old that the railway line runs there very near the shore, and that, as a natural sequence, there is no likelihood of meeting with any birds on that side, I went down to the ferry and crossed over.

Wivenhoe is a favourite place for yachts to take their winter moorings. There were, drawn along the shore, about thirty splendid yachts, several among them being of very large tonnage, and a few of the largest were steamers. In truth, no better and safer moorings could be found, and the ferryman told me that two score, or even more, of yachts drawn up there, rank and file, was not an unusual number.

Past Wivenhoe the estuary widens considerably, and is, I should say, fully a quarter of a mile across; in consequence, birds may be tantalisingly visible on the other shore whilst your own side of the "softs" is bare. This was the case with me when I was opposite the red-tiled house near the lane, for, although I could see nothing on my side, yet there were hundreds of birds on the other.

Just then a cockleshell of a boat hove in sight. I hailed the man who was in it, and asked him to row me over, which he readily agreed to do. I jumped in, and found then that my man was an oyster dredger, and that his boat was quite loaded with oysters.

"Have you a knife?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir."

"Then lend it to me: I am going to 'wire' into your natives whilst we are under way."

I took the knife, and proceeded with gusto to taste the freshly-caught oysters. I can safely say that I never ate any better, as it was the first time I ever had any just picked up from the beds. If brother-shooters go that way I recommend them a trial.

Well, ten minutes' row in the teeth of a strong wind brought us over, but before I landed a train came up, and all the birds were off. So we retraced our way, and after settling with the fisherman I clambered up the wall once more and went on. A quarter of a mile farther I came to an open marsh, where I found lots of birds of the wading family, and managed to stalk a dozen very successfully. The marsh is covered with a thick grass that deadens the sound of footsteps, and at low-tide, when the creeks are empty, or nearly so, there are lots of greenshanks, redshanks, plovers, and sandpipers. I consider the stalking to each creek, and flushing of the birds, a most entertaining sport. As regards the red and green shanks it is as amusing as, and more difficult to pursue than, snipe shooting. Somehow a redshank, when flushed, resorts to wiles and dodges which a snipe does not think of. There was one which I came upon quite suddenly, and which rose within twenty yards of my gun, yet I did not bag it, simply because it put me out altogether, in such a way as I have never seen any other bird practise. Instead of rising as an orthodox bird ought to do, it got up only five inches from the bottom of the creek, dashed behind a lump of mud, just in time to escape my first shot, which riddled the said lump like a sieve. Then he flew along the bank, out of sight, for ten yards, cut back again, and actually went away, clean missed by the second barrel, fired, in the midst of a succession of his dashes, to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south. Oh! how he did exult, to be sure! On the other hand, where these birds are fairly abundant, as they are in the marsh I am speaking of, it is good sport to pursue them; for, in almost every creek (as near the main stream as possible, mind) you are sure to flush one, two, three, and sometimes half-a-dozen. The birds are very hard to hit, owing to their extraordinary style of getting out of the way, even when flushed close at hand, and a man who can make a right and left on redshanks, and grass both birds, is a clever shot.

To have a fair shot at them when pitching into a creek, this is the plan I always adopt: I go (under wind, of course) up to within fifteen yards of the creek, there I place myself so as to command the part before me handsomely, and being ready, I sign to the dog, and he goes down the creek under wind. I hear him

patter, patter, in the water, and presently the noise stops. I know what it means; he scents the birds; now for it. He dashes ahead, and up go the birds, uttering their peculiarly pretty whistle, when bang! and bang! I do my best to floor a couple.

When you have fired, don't think that the birds will in a body leave the marsh. Those even that were fired at and missed, frequently pitch again in some other creek, and you can always see a good many if you take the trouble to look for them. The trouble is undoubtedly very great. In order to reach a good wide creek, where you may expect to find birds, you will have, most likely, to go down a score of small insignificant ones, and cross them in some way or other.

Fundamental rule in wildfowl shooting: If you wish to succeed, don't spare yourself, your dog, or your ammunition, and let nothing that is overcomable daunt your courage or damp your energies. If you see birds going down anywhere, make up your mind to get at them *somehow*, and do it, at whatever cost to your legs or to your comfort. There is, in the marsh I am speaking of, a very wide creek going inland some distance, which cuts, so to speak, the marsh in two. Along the off-side of this creek a sea-wall has been erected, and this wall leads the shooter to a series of flats, as good for sport as the marsh I have mentioned. In fact, a hundred shots can be fired quite readily there, so easily are the small bunches of shanks, and the numerous flocks of sandpipers and oxbirds got at.

There were many large birds about, too. I saw almost continually, divers, black-ducks, ducks, coots, widgeon, and teal on the wing. I saw also two long "files" of geese (gray-geese, I judged them to be), and these were travelling due south, as though very hard weather were experienced in the north.

About a mile from the Pyefleet channel, as I was trudging along under the lee of the sea-wall, what should I perceive but a bunch of ducks together, with about a dozen redshanks, under the lee of a wide creek's bank, all pluming themselves very contentedly. The sight was so sudden that I sank below the level of the bank "like a brick," and I held within myself a council of war. It was lucky, indeed, that I had cast a glance just then over the wall. Well, the tide was "half-flow," therefore it had yet two or three hours coming in, so that some of the smaller creeks were well-nigh empty. I peeped over at the bend, out of sight of the birds, and quickly made up a plan of action. There was a minor creek, only a couple of yards wide, which was winding about like a corkscrew, and in one of its turns it actually passed within fifty yards of the large creek where my birds were. In the small creek

was about a foot of water, but the banks were a yard-and-a-half high, and making allowance for the hole in which the birds were ensconced, it was impossible that they should see me. As to hearing me, why, there was half a gale blowing right in my teeth, and, with such an ally, I was safe.

Over the bank I went, down in the marsh, and I popped into the creek. I got two cartridges, No. 5 shot, in my central-fire Tolley 10-bore, and I placed two more cartridges ready in a side-pocket. I cautioned the dog to keep strictly to heel by giving him a gentle slap across the muzzle, and silently we went on. First to the right, then to the left, back again and forward again; all this is puzzling, but a look about tells me I am getting on right, and when I am at the point I have noticed at first, I clamber out of the creek on to the marsh. Now the ducks are within range although I cannot see them, but I should like to walk up to them. The wind has, if anything, increased, and the snow is blinding me. I walk sideways towards the creek. Forty yards, thirty yards, twenty yards, and I spy a motion on the water. I walk on. The dog, who has now the benefit of the scent of the birds, stands by my side with his top-knot and ears on end, and eyes starting out of his head with excitement.

Now for it! I walk hurriedly on, and as I hear the splashing, I stop and steady myself, just in time. Two ducks appear together as one, and are floored; I miss another with the second barrel. I open the gun, load again, and fire at the rest, which are by that time facing the wind in great disorder, and I bring down a mallard. I then observe that a teal is swimming away in the creek; I go round, and cut off its retreat, when the dog soon manages to mouth it. Evidently this wounded bird had acted as decoy, and had enticed the ducks and shanks to settle with it—hence this unusual daytime congregation on the flats.

Well, I was loaded pretty well, and could do no more. The tide, besides, was soon up, and I walked on steadily until I came to the Point, when I hailed a passing boat and went to Brightlingsea, where my friend Charlie was waiting for me, as per agreement. At Brightlingsea, where I landed at 2 P.M., I hired a man to carry my birds and ammunition, so that whilst he trudged along on the wall, I kept ahead and fired when anything turned up.

We then went to the Mersea Island, and on landing I shot a teal out of a brace, missing the other bird unaccountably.

At West Mersea, after some refreshment at the White Hart, I went with Charlie on board his yacht, and at night I had some popping at the flocks. Then, with the tide, we sailed up the estuary. At Wivenhoe we went ashore and took the train for

Colchester, where we spent the night and the next day, which was Sunday.

On Sunday night we went back to the boat, and dropped down to East Mersea, where I attended the morning flight on Monday.

Being late, I only shot one duck. A Mersea man was out, during the night, in a punt, and shot seven or eight ducks, and another puntman nailed nine or ten coots. Several other swivel-guns were fired, and the men declared that the fowl were more abundant than they had yet been that season.

I wandered about part of the day in the dingy, and landed several times, with pretty fair success.

In the afternoon, we sailed up again, and I rode back to Colchester, *en route* for London. The weather on the Monday was delightfully fine, though cold, and my rambles were thoroughly enjoyable. Anyone who would like to try the Colne Estuary may depend upon it that, in proper weather, if he does not spare his exertions he will be well repaid. The men, however, are not always to be trusted, as they dislike strangers bagging their (?) birds; so don't put too much confidence in what they say, for they will, likely enough, try to mislead you. See the place yourself, and make your plans accordingly, just as the wind, the tide, and the weather prompt you to act. There is sport for shoulder-guns, and sport for punt-guns, so there is some choice left for sporting spirits; and from my experience thereof, I would say that either in a boat, in a punt, or on land, a practised wildfowler will meet, on the Colne Estuary, with very fair sport and good fun.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE RIVER CROUCH.

The season drawing fast to an end, my friend Charlie and I had agreed that we would make a fine cruise of it, so as to bring it to a full stop with all the glory befitting a noble sport. Accordingly, I arranged to be absent from home for three or four days, and we agreed to go as far as Woodbridge in Suffolk.

On Thursday afternoon then, the 11th January, I went to Fenchurch Street station, and booked myself (*viâ* Tilbury) to Gravesend, where I arrived a little after three; the tide was to be high at half-past four, or thereabouts, so we had plenty of time, and Charlie and I perambulated the town for a little while, and looked on at the preparations being made already for the coming pleasuring season. Rosherville Gardens ("the place to spend a happy day") were in bloom, and according to the *on-dits*, a full company of visitors was shortly expected there.

We went back aboard at 4 P.M., the sheets were loosened, and we got everything in tacking order.

The wind blew fitfully from Essex, and so far it was fair enough, but heavy clouds appeared to crowd over Tilbury, and we accordingly prepared for the worst, our sou'-westers being placed by, handy on deck.

At about a quarter to five the tide turned, and I do not think I should stretch much, were I to tell that it ran pretty well like a sluice left open from a full reservoir. In fact, it ran past the landing-stages, barges, and stairs with a violence that was positively startling, and the way the boatmen began to secure their small craft was a caution to behold, so it may be imagined how we sped along when we left our moorings, and turned her head to the Nore. Two or three other yachts were just spreading their wings, after their long winter rest, and we had a short spin with one of these, a small cutter that we picked up opposite the Old Ship and Lobster.

A little after 6 P.M. we were in sight of Sheerness, and debated for a good while whether we should go on or not, as it appeared doubtful whether the weather would settle fine, or get regularly nasty. In the midst of our arguments, we fell in with two yachts going home, and the Shrimp fleet appeared also doubtful, so we, wisely, ran in for shelter, and spent the night there.

Early on Friday morning we were off, and a single tack took us over to the Mouse Light. There we met a wildfowling yacht coming out at the Blacktail Beacon, and we spoke to them. They had been beating up the river Crouch, and had had some sport, although they had not bagged much. I should have liked to have gone in then, but the tide was running out, the wind was against us, and the passage so shallow that our *confrères* esteemed themselves lucky to have sailed it in safety. Finding that sailing in was an impossibility for the time being, I proposed that we should anchor at one of the mouths of the stream, and that I should go in the dingy with the gun. It was 9 A.M. The weather was cold but fine, and the water as quiet as a mill-pond. We went up the Crouch for a good half mile without seeing a single bird. Then we met a lot of shore birds, but they were all extra wary, and notwithstanding our efforts we only succeeded, in three hours' time, in bagging a curlew. We saw no ducks of any kind, but the wading family was there *sur le qui vive*; and turn where we would, and look whichever way we liked, scarcely did we pop into a creek for a quiet row up to the head, than some watching bird would give the alarm, and the whole lot domiciled there would take to flight. This "riled" me, and I found fault with the man who accompanied me. He should not talk at all. Very good. He was silent ever after, but no birds would let us get near them all the same. Then, one of the paddles creaked on the rowlock. We stuffed the said paddle with a rag, but the birds seemed to smell us there! and all our usual tricks and dodges failed.

How our single curlew had the misfortune to come by, so innocently, I cannot imagine, but it was lucky he did, or we should have got back to the yacht, *bredouille.*

Well, after a long try, we gave it up and rowed back, and then, *chemin faisant*, I shot several of the smaller waders whenever they gave me a chance. Back on board at 1 P.M., set sail, and then we sat down to dinner.

Charlie attributed my want of luck to the fact that it was a Friday, and I attributed it to the fact that the birds had had very mild weather of late, and, as a natural consequence, they were themselves once more, and could take care that no one should get too close to them.

Whilst enjoying our dinner we felt a slight bump, and rushed on deck. The two men had also felt it, and were easing the boat off the shore still more, but, not content with that, Charlie ordered one of them to keep the lead going until we had passed the Bussey Sands (which are there very thoughtfully marked by a prominent buoy), and as it is not pleasant to get stuck there for even a single tide, we gave the shoals a wide berth, and reached the regular entrance to the Crouch without any mishap. The tide was rising again, but the mud-banks were still bare for many miles, and save for the two beacons which mark the navigable channel of the river, the whole appeared an inextricable maze of ooze and stagnant pools of water. We waited a little while for a good depth, and then ventured in. The Crouch is known for its oyster-beds, and we forthwith made up our minds to secure some of these edibles, and seeing a boat well laden, ahead of us, made chase after it, but the little craft drew half as little water as we did, and it got us into a regular mess, for we struck four or five times, but fortunately the next sweeps of the tide invariably floated us at once: were it blowing hard at any time, I think a boat would heel over, or get otherwise seriously damaged, if its keel should ever catch seriously into that thick mud.

Howbeit, we went on, and for fear of a regular "sticking" case we kept in mid channel, and soon overhauled our oyster man, who was crawling up with a white sail, in the midst of which a large patch, quite dark brown, was inelegantly sewn to mend a bad rent, though it hardly matched the colour.

We found the fellow splitting his sides "a-lafin."

"I made sure," he said, "I would get you stuck. All you yacht fellows stick to us fishermen like leeches, when you don't know exactly your way."

"So you would if you were in a strange part, would not you?" replied Charlie, "and it is hardly fair that you should have deliberately tried to get us into a mess. However, let us have some of your oysters."

"Oh! be that what you were after, master?" said the man, with a startling change in his countenance, "to be sure, sir, how many dozens, sir?"

The grin had quite left the man's face then, and he was as full of business and politeness as he was, a moment before, full of frolic and mischief. Anyhow, he did not lose sight of his interest, for he charged us at higher than market prices, and then looked as if he had granted us a great favour.

Meanwhile I had kept an eye about for birds. There were plenty of gulls on the banks, and a flock or two of oyster-catchers

kept on the wing about for a good while, but no ducks were to be seen.

At dusk we anchored for the night, and I went in the dingy with Cook, one of the men, for oarsman. I successfully stalked a heron and three greenshanks, and had a shot at a duck, but did not hit it, and that was all we saw that evening in the way of decent birds, although there were thousands of oxbirds about, and many sandpipers were whistling all night and whirling and tumbling about within shooting distance of the deck; but they did not tempt me. Charlie went to Burnham with the dingy on my return, and I felt sorry when he was gone that I had not gone too, for there was evidently nothing to be done, and we did not even launch the punt that night.

Very early in the morning, however, I had a bit of sport, such as it was. Cook came tumbling into the cabin in a great hurry, and announced a "company" floating by. I dressed as quickly as I could, *i.e.* put on the first pair of inexpressibles that came to hand, slipped on a coat, and rushed to the dingy, where the man awaited me, ready and as anxious as I was.

"There they are," said he, pointing somewhere astern, and with noiseless pulls he shifted us, and we glided past the yacht.

I crouched forward with a 4-bore gun (the only one I could get in my hurry), slipped a cartridge into the breech, closed it quietly (and, by the way, those Snider actions do sometimes kick up a noise in the stillness of night), and by the time we had dropped a hundred yards my eyes were reconciled to the semi-darkness. There was a slight mist on the river, such as exists almost every morning when there is no breeze. Down the stream we went, until Cook declared, in a whisper, that he had lost the birds, for he could not see them anywhere.

"I think," I said, that you have been dreaming, and that the birds never existed but in your imagination."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth, when, from behind the bank, rose the troop—about ten all told. I fired into the thickest portion of the company, as their outlines were well depicted against a bit of clear sky in the east, killed two outright and maimed a third.

"Now," I remarked, "I have no cripple-gun!"

"What a lark!" exclaimed Cook.

But it was not a lark, all the same, for, what were we to do? There was the bird, full of dance as yet, and by no means would he let us nab him. He kept quiet enough until we stooped over the gun'le, when flash! he would show us his tail, and go to the bottom. Once Cook came near him, very steadily got up, and

with a paddle tried to knock him on the head, but missed him, of course, and nearly went overboard himself. Finally, I had to sacrifice a 4-bore cartridge to secure the bird.

Dawn of day being near at hand when we got back, I resolved to have a quiet morning's popping from the yacht's deck, but did nothing in the way of bagging, though I fired four or five times.

With the next tide we left the Crouch, in company with, at least, twenty other craft, all seemingly coasters and fishermen. Only one of these betrayed any wildfowling propensities. It was a four or five-ton boat, cutter-rigged, professionally used, evidently, for its sails were of the patch and multicolour order, and astern rode a punt, ready for use, but the swivel-gun was shipped, and lay at bottom of the shallow concern.

Of course we shaped our course towards them. They were going to Southend, and had had little fun, so they said. But there is no trusting these professionals, they always tell you that there is no wildfowl to be had, yet they live by it. The fact is, as soon as a locality is known to be much frequented by the fowl, there flocks such a congregation of shooters, that there is hardly room on the water, or on the marsh, for the fowl to settle at all. When things come to such a pass, it is enough to make the puntmen and other professionals tear out their hair; but they should bear in mind that such things bring with them their own remedy, for, when the unskilful amateurs have frightened away the birds, they (the amateurs) go away too, and the resort again becomes as attractive to the birds as it was before.

Still it does take time to reassure them; and when they become disgusted with a locality for any great length of time, they do not again take to it very readily, notwithstanding the natural attractions of the place, such as its seclusion, or its very fine feeding marshes. There are, on the coasts, scores of places which have been, turn by turn, scared of birds, then allowed again to be attractive to them, only to be once more scared, and the whole series of incidents repeated over and over again. Now, one would think that, as each season comes in, the new broods in search of suitable places of resort would, as likely as not, pitch into the first good place that turns up in their line of flight. But this is a mistake, for the new broods are almost always "headed" by "leaders" that are old hands at the game, who know the map of England as well as we know our own gardens, and never make a mistake.

Of course none of us could assert, for a fact, that a duck once fired at, in a marsh, never faces that same marsh again. But it may safely be asserted that he never again goes to that particular

spot in the marsh where he was fired at. Therefore, if he is repeatedly disturbed, no matter where he may pitch in a marsh, decidedly he will leave it for good. That is how it happens that some naturally first-rate wildfowl resorts are almost totally abandoned. But the evil will eventually work its own cure, and I know, for instance, a spot, not a hundred miles from town, where there were not ten shots to be fired, at the best of times, this season, which, in a year or two, if it is left alone, will be a perfect paradise for a few shooters, if they only keep it quiet.

A certain section of the sporting world always tries to damp any intending wildfowl shooter's spirits by direful tales about the absence of fowl, and by assertions that wherever there is a shot to be fired, there are ten shooters to fire that shot, ready on the spot. Now, wildfowl are always to be found (in proper season and weather), if not at one place, then at another, and there are plenty of birds for everybody; it only costs trouble to find them; but the fact is, wildfowl shooting is not considered a fashionable sport by our swell shooters, because the latter do not like its dangers or discomforts. Such a sport will never be fashionable, because it cannot be made acceptable to the majority of those rich shooters, who like to take their sport with the comforts and surroundings of a drawing-room; so that, considering how shootings are secured everywhere now, and that wildfowl shooting is hardly noticed, and not made much of, so far, it is likely enough that, for the enthusiastic shooter, whose purse will no longer allow him the hiring of a shooting on the terms that are now asked for such, there will eventually remain but one branch of shooting in which he will be enabled to freely indulge himself, and that will be wildfowl shooting. Wildfowl shooting, then, is very likely to become the sport of the future. Now, in sober truth, is there any other shooting that offers such sport, such incidents, such a variety of scenes? To those who have fathomed its difficulties and pleasures, there is always in a wild-fowlshooting expedition an irresistible attraction, which few thorough sportsmen can withstand, and such men will put up cheerfully, for wildfowling' sake, with discomforts that would stagger some of our fashionable school of shooters.

Well, after our confab with the professionals, we separated at the mouth of the river. They turned by Foulness Point, whilst we headed north; but, as this chapter only pretends to treat of the Crouch, and my space is getting now limited, I must bring my narrative to a stop, as far as that river is concerned.

I am sorry I could not give a more glowing account of it; but two things were against meeting with success during that

excursion—firstly, the great traffic and the not inconsiderable shooting that are carried on there; secondly, the lateness of the season. In hard weather, brother-shooters will always meet with jolly sport on the Crouch, if they can only spare the time to look for it. Well, at 1 P.M. we were fairly abreast of the Blackwater, and . . . . but I must really pull up now, and will relate in my next of our sport along the coast, and particularly on the river Deben, where I had heard that very fine bags could still be made.

March, 1875.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EAST-COAST ESTUARIES, FROM THE CROUCH TO THE DEBEN.

Few professed wildfowl shooters do not know, more or less intimately, the dangerous nature of the estuaries and promontories of the East Coast, within a hundred miles of the mouth of the Thames; therefore, it is almost unnecessary on my part to recommend great caution to would-be shooters, when sailing along that coast. The sand-banks, mud-banks, flats, &c., are puzzling, all the more so, on account of the former occasionally shifting, and therefore good attention must be paid to the yacht's course, and the tides must be kept uppermost in one's mind. With these precautions, and avoiding sailing on dark nights, there is no reason why a trip northway may not be quite as enjoyable as a cruise in the Mediterranean.

As for sport with the gun, the East Coast offers as good as most grounds.

Now, some men with a sporting turn of mind, but with short purses, are always on the look-out for some mode of employing their time pleasant to their tastes, and filling to the purse. Such could find few more interesting and profitable undertakings than those of killing wildfowl during the season, and fishing during the remainder of the year. If pride should, by chance, stand in the way, that is the very first thing that ought to be got rid of—

> Honour and shame from no condition rise,
> Act well your part—there all the honour lies.

And certainly, for the life of me, I cannot see any dishonour in a man pluckily trying to make a fair living out of his love of sport. Many men who would be glad to do it (if it could be done on the sly) find that they cannot make it pay, because their employment of "go-betweens" swallows up all profits.

For instance, ten years ago, at a yacht regatta on the river Thames, I became acquainted with an enthusiastic Corinthian who had actually made his yacht his home, so great was his love of the water. He was a nice fellow, and we frequently sailed in consort. He was pretty well off, then, but went too fast, and ran through his money very quickly. Well, his knowledge of sport, of the river, and of the coast induced him to try wildfowling as a living. He succeeded very fairly indeed, as far as bagging birds was concerned, for he was an intrepid fellow, and would not be denied, and if he had managed the money dealings himself, he would have done well, but his pride was in the way, he did not wish people to know that he was killing fowl for his living, and trusted his man. The said man cheated him right and left, and made the sport, as a profession to his master, an impossibility, because he swallowed up the profits. Nothing could pay under such heavy handicaps. After trying for a season, the boat was sold, and our ex-Corinthian disappeared.

Now had he manfully carried on his bargains himself, I dare-say he would be still on board his boat, for, there is no mistake about it, wildfowling, as a profession, pays, and pays very well indeed. I know two brothers who are carrying it on year after year, and who would not give it up for a trifle, and I know another fellow who supplies a West-end shop with fowl with almost the regularity of a farmer who kills his chickens.

A man with nerve, judgment, knowledge of sailing, and love of sport, ought, by investing say £150 in a boat, swivel-gun, shoulder-guns, &c., to be able to keep himself and a lad in his service, to keep his boat and punt in thoroughly efficient order, to enjoy himself, and to net on an average £1 a day during the wildfowling season.

Some men make a great deal more than that.

The great thing is, observation of the haunts of birds, patience in working to them, and good guns for the actual work. Now, many of the old hands combine the two first qualifications, and fail now in making a tolerable living out of the sport, simply because their guns are inferior. The old swivels and shoulder-guns do not carry far enough for the wary fowl of our period, and many of our old hands fail to bag enough of them on that account. No one who knows anything about the subject, will deny that the fowl are, by far, wilder than they used to be, therefore, unless very powerful guns are used, little can be done, and I think this has been conclusively and practically proved in this series of papers on wildfowl resorts. Fortunately, our guns nowadays are made to hit very hard and very far, and their

prices are not, certainly, very high. I daresay a fair swivel-gun would be turned out by a reliable maker for perhaps less than £30, and as for shoulder-guns, £15 will secure a perfectly reliable weapon.

The gun outfit for a yacht and punt, I take it, ought to be as follows for efficient work: Firstly, a swivel-gun, say £30; secondly, two single flock-guns, to take 4-bore cartridges, at £15 each; thirdly, a double 12 or 16-bore cripple-gun, £15—(those prices are for men of moderate means, who want to make the thing pay; those who only wish to enjoy themselves, and to whom money is no consideration, can invest almost to any amount)—well, the total amount for these four guns, according to my estimates, comes to £75. This leaves £75 for the purchase of the boat and punt, quite an ample sum, if you know how to set about it. Of course, no yacht builder, and even no yacht mender, could accommodate you on such terms.

There are, however, scores, ay, hundreds of little yachts, which will suit you, and which you can get, for ready cash, at low prices.

Suppose we go down to Southend, for instance, at the beginning of the winter season, for that is the best time to buy second-hand boats. Their owners may have had enough of yachting, even in summer weather; or they may have met with reverses of fortune, or there may be some other cause which brings about the wish to sell. Now, suppose the owner of a small yacht is willing to sell it, say for £100, a dealer who has examined the boat, or who knows it well, demurs at this, and offers £50 cash down. This the owner peremptorily declines, and the dealer goes his way, knowing full well that should no one else turn up, the owner will eventually let him have the boat on his own terms.

But should *you* go to the owner and offer him £75 cash down, he would jump at your offer, rather than run the risk and expense of wintering the craft, or perhaps have to pass even then under the dealer's *fourches caudines*, as is usually the case, for small yacht owners are, as a rule, by far too simple in their dealings; they trust to chance, whereas an advertisement or two in a proper paper would almost to a certainty insure a speedy and fair buyer for their craft.

Whatever may be the manner in which an intending wildfowler secures his yacht, he must make sure that the craft is a strong, sturdy concern, drawing little water, and able to take the ground without "listing" much. Its gear need not be very elegant, but it must be as sound as a smack, for it has to stand as much wear

and tear, and as much rough weather, as most fishing craft. It need not be a very fast sailing boat, but it must be one very easily handled, as success on the flocks at sea depends very much on the way in which the boat "answers."

Concerning the internal accommodation, there are few boats ready to be bought which would completely suit for the purpose; but an intelligent carpenter and a smart joiner, when they make up their minds to work, can do wonders in that line in a couple of days. Finally, it should be remembered that the smaller the craft, and the more unassuming its appearance, the more likely is its owner to find sport with it.

As regards sport, no one must judge from the following narrative of the capabilities of the coast, when the season is in its prime. Many birds had left for their breeding grounds, the season being virtually in its last days, and therefore my sport there can be no criterion of the sport to be found when the flocks are "all there" and the weather is fit.

It was a little after 1 P.M., if I remember right, when we passed the Blackwater. The tide was low, and several boats had anchored about the mouth of the river, waiting for the flow, and a precious long waiting it was to be, for the tide was not to be quite up till 7 P.M., and at any rate no boats would venture in till four or half-past.

I thought I should like to see how the old river was getting on, and as Charlie was intending to have the usual "Saturday clearing and cleaning," I left him and the men on board, and stepped into the dingy by myself. I placed my double 10-bore and a single 4-bore in the stern, rigged on the little mast, hoisted the "handkerchief" sail, and away bounded the little skiff.

When I got within the estuary the wind was off my shallow craft, and I had to take to an amphibious style of progress, half sail, half row, that was not without its charm, for it warmed me at any rate, and the weather was cold and no mistake. I went up some distance with the tide, and fired half-a-dozen cartridges at two divers and a coot. When I turned back it was half-past four, and I made all speed, as I was anxious to be back on board in time for sailing away with the tide. Fortunately, a land breeze helped me along, but, as it was, I had a long and hard pull against the now strong flow ere I sighted the yacht. In another half-hour I reached the boat, and was glad to rest. Well, we set sail, and whilst passing the Colne fell in with some smacks, one of which drew close, and a man on board asked us for some newspapers. We had two or three, and one of the men rowed up to

get them. No sooner had they been handed to him, than he flung on our deck a string of fine fish.

"Them were alive and kickin'," said he, "just two hours ago, and I'll lay a sov. you will enjoy them, gentlemen."

"Nay, nay," said we, "this is hardly fair, our three papers are not by any means worth your fine fish. Come aboard and have a drain."

"Can't," he replied, "the skipper is in a hurry."

"Well, here is a tumbler then for yourself, and a bottle for your mates."

"Thanks." He drained the glass and rowed off, wishing us a pleasant sail.

These fisher fellows are a nice set of men, and it is not the first time by far that I have seen them thrusting their best fish on those they meet on the water. In fact, they delight to see gentlemen who love their craft, and it is only the river loafers who deride and scoff at amateurs. The true seaman and fisherman is as fond of a yachtsman as if he were one of his own *caste*, and I have seen men of that class going a long way out of their course to help yachtsmen in distress or in some bother.

The evening had set in fine, and a fair breeze, though there was not much of it, helped us along in good style. A lot of craft were with us, and what a strange, impressive spectacle it is to see those dark sails gliding along noiselessly, and bobbing occasionally, as the rollers come on running to the shore.

We had a magnificent night of it, and the next day being Sunday (no shooting), I took my share of the working of the boat during the night watches. We passed Walton-on-the-Naze at ten o'clock. A nasty bit of sand necessitated our sheering off shore a mile or so farther than ought to be needed. At 1 A.M. (Sunday) the lights of Harwich were in sight, but as I did not know the entrance to the harbour I called up Charlie, and he took charge of the boat while I turned in. In about an hour and a half we were at anchor opposite the Pier Hotel, and all went to bed with pleasure, I will warrant.

At 9 A.M., taking advantage of the ebb-tide, we tripped our anchor and set sail. We had a spin up the river Stour just to see how it looked, and went as far as Mistley, after which we came back and went up the Orwell. There we had plenty of pitching, for we had a fair breeze but a heavy cross-tide, and deluging the deck was the order of the morning.

I saw few birds—ducks I mean; perhaps a couple of score all told, and very wild. Plenty of herons, however, and flocks of shanks of all sorts.

A multitude of boats and craft of all kinds were in the harbour when we left, and we met no sail whatsoever coming up, during our exit. When fairly out and opposite Landguard Fort, we saw a large flock basking in the sun, and had it not been Sunday we would have gone in chase.

That afternoon was very peacefully spent. The two men sat forward, smoking their pipes and talking quietly of their own affairs; Charlie held the tiller, whilst I, stretched at full length on deck, listened to his yarns.

We stood on and away, abreast of the river Deben, for a couple of hours, again waiting for the tide, and nothing broke the stillness of the scene but the splash of the wavelets as they broke over the bows. The weather was quite mild; in fact, a summer sun shone for a good part of the day.

The next day (Monday, the 15th) being the last lawful duck-shooting day of the season, I had made up my mind to make it a jolly day's sport, and in the evening, when we had anchored for the night at the mouth of the Deben, I got all my ammunition ready, fully determined to fire it all down to the very last cartridge.

We were snug enough all night, very few craft being about, and before dawn Cook and I started on our expedition.

I gave Cook a gun, with leave to use it whenever opportunity offered, and on we went. I landed in a creek, and told him I would beat the shore well, and if he remained well hidden in a nook and kept his eyes open, he might nail something on its passage down. He ensconced the dingy in a hole in the bank, and I could only see his head popping up now and then, as I went on.

My first shots were at two redshanks—bagged one, missed the other.

Two hundred yards farther, I came to a deep side creek, where I went very quietly and popped on a tribe of oxbirds on the feed. I killed five with the first barrel and one with the second. Immediately afterwards there was a puff of smoke, and I saw something large coming down in Cook's direction. Then I heard the boom! It was a teal, as I heard afterwards.

I went right up to the head of the creek, and suddenly came upon a piece of "soft," and went down into it up to my thighs. I threw my body backwards and after a great deal of cautious wriggling I got off, but oh! so wet and so cold. I tried to walk along the "soft," but it was too slimy and treacherous, so I turned back very reluctantly, because I felt sure there was something good at the creek in front. When I got to the dingy I

found Cook, with a curlew and the aforementioned teal, sitting very contentedly at the bottom of the little boat. I got in and we rowed to the creek.

Sure enough, there was a perfect tribe of birds there, and when I first peeped over the bank I could see, towering above the others, the back of a heron, gravely taking a footbath and watching for fish. The bird was about sixty yards away. I popped down to put the 10-bore on the seat and to collar a 4-bore, but, in so doing, my slimy boots slipped; I went down into the boat, and nearly went over as well. I knew the noise must have startled the birds, so I popped up again recklessly to have a shy at them anyhow. The heron was sailing well away, and him I fired at. He shook his head, stopped, shook himself again, went on, and finally came slowly down at about 150 yards from us, beyond two impassable creeks. The other birds escaped scot-free. I landed, looked for some way to get my heron, but there was none, and we had to leave him there until the tide filled up the creek and enabled us to go to him. He was still alive, was very wickedly inclined, trying no less than putting my eyes out, and he actually gave me a good dig in the breast whilst I was preparing to put him out of his misery.

At night we bagged only a coot, and fired at many small birds. That river Deben in season is a first-class one for sport; it takes a boat to do it well, and several days to do it justice. As far as my experience goes, I certainly should rank the Deben with the Blackwater and with the Orwell; it is as quiet as either of these, and less frequented by shooters.

The best way to sport there for those who care not about sailing to it along the coast, would be to go by train to Woodbridge in Suffolk. The trains start from Bishopsgate at 9 A.M., 11.45 A.M., and 4.25 P.M., reaching Woodbridge respectively at 11.55 A.M., 2.47 P.M., and 7.24 P.M. There is good accommodation at Woodbridge, and anyone making up his mind to give the river a fair trial in due season cannot fail to be pleased with it.

It would not be a bad plan for a man who could spare a week to go by train to Ipswich, there secure a boat with a good boatman, and do the three rivers within the week—say, two days on the Orwell, a day on the Stour, and two days on the Deben, leaving a day for travelling by rail to the place and for making arrangements.

For a couple of guineas, a boat and a man could be secured for the week, and if the shooter does not then fill the sternsheets with birds, all I can say is, there must be something wrong with his powder, or else his gun-barrels are not held straight.

March, 1875.

SHOOTING IN FRANCE.

CHAPTER XV.

A "ST. HUBERT" IN FRANCE.

I HAD been shooting for nearly a month with my friend Thomson at his place in Le Poitou, and one fine evening towards the end of October, as we were trudging up the hill towards home, across the vineyards, after as good a day's sport as we could have wished to have—

"Now, Thomson," said I, "no more nonsense; you must not detain me any longer. I have been enjoying myself so well here that I would fain accept your very kind but romantic invitation to stay here *forever*, but duty calls me yonder over the mackerel-ditch, and I really must go; so, if you please, you will help me to pack up to-morrow and I will be off the next day."

"Pooh-pooh!" said he, "how you do go on! Duty! Bosh! Don't tell me; I daresay you are tired of my wretched abode, and that is why you want to go."

"You will make me very angry," I retorted warmly, "if you repeat such an absurd insinuation."

"Well, of course," he went on, "we did our best, my boy, and you know the proverb, '*La plus belle fille du monde ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a.*' Would to goodness I could have offered you my hospitality in a castle!"

"Surely," I said, stopping suddenly on the road and confronting him face to face, "surely you are joking; you can't mean what you say. I have never been more happy and more comfortable in all my life than with you."

"Really?"

"Truly! and as I said before, could I but remain longer I would be but too glad."

"Ah well, then," said he, "if such be the case, that is all right. But you must remain with us at least another week; come now."

We were then entering his house, where, on the threshold, his wife met us, and she joined with him in his wishes.

"The *Saint Hubert*," he went on, "takes place in five days, on the 3rd of November. You must stay at least until then, and see it out."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Why, it is the *fête* of the shooters' patron, and on that day all the *chasseurs* go out sporting. After the day's sport they all dine together, and rare fun it is then, generally, besides the fun in the field, where the greatest muffs and the cleverest shots are mixed up together; so that it is, turn by turn, entertaining or laughable."

"And where does the dinner take place?"

"At the inn, in the village."

"Well, I will stop till then at any rate, but mind, no longer; for really I must go, and in truth I ought to be home by now."

And so it came to pass that on the 3rd of November (which was ushered in by a splendid morning), when at 9 A.M. Thomson and I made our *entrée* in the *grand salon* of the inn, we found it crowded with the queerest medley of men and dogs it has ever been my lot to see brought together.

Our arrival was greeted with enthusiasm on the part of the majority of those assembled; a few of the oldest shooters, however, seemed to affect a certain *froideur*, which no doubt had its source in the jealousy which always exists, more or less, between shooters who know each other's skill and dread somewhat a contest. We soon, however, made ourselves comfortable at the table, which was spread with unbounded prodigality. My immediate neighbours were an old *notaire* and an elderly farmer, and very nice neighbours they proved to be.

Howbeit, when breakfast had been discussed, the arrangements of the day were set forth clearly and distinctly by the *notaire*. We were to shoot as we liked, wherever we liked, and as best we could; but, at the end of the day, everyone would have to show his bag; and he who should have killed the greatest number of heads of game would forthwith be declared "King" and be installed at the head of the table; but should there be one or two of the shooters turning up empty handed, they would for the nonce fulfil towards the King the office of butlers, and would be bound to get up and fill the King's glass as often as he should choose to empty it and call for more. The lawyer concluded by

saying that, from time out of mind, such had been the usual conditions on St. Hubert's Day, and he hoped none of the youngsters would have to undergo the penance contained in the latter part of the programme. This brought forth roars of laughter from everyone present, and we all left the inn rather tumultuously.

Thomson went off with an acquaintance of his, whilst I was taken charge of by the farmer and the *notaire*. Said the farmer mysteriously to me:

"Are you a good shot?"

"Middling," I said. "I am no star, you know; but I do as well as most people."

"Well, I am a first-class shooter," said he, pompously; "I should defy any man to wipe my eye——"

"Draw it mild," said the *notaire*; "you are no great shakes!"

The farmer shrugged his shoulders but said no more. We entered the fields then and separated. Already, shots had been heard behind us, so we knew that if we did not look out and proceed quickly we would come rather late for our share of the pie. I was, naturally enough, particularly anxious to distinguish myself. Thomson and I had made our cartridges with extra care the day before, and when we had parted for the day's sport he had whispered to me:

"Now, mind, old boy, and do your best. Show these foreigners what you can do, for the sake of the old country."

"Never fear," I had replied. So I meant to do my level best: and when I picked out from my belt a cartridge No. 5 and one No. 4, shoved them in the breech and closed the gun, I thought to myself: "Now I am ready. *Ayons bon pied, bon œil*, and all will go well."

My friend's servant Pat, who, like most Irish servants, was a cure, was to be my porter for that day, and as he complacently arranged the game-bag on his back I could see that he too was confident of having something in it ere long; that increased my own confidence, and I felt in fine trim.

Whirr! a partridge! between us and the *notaire*. Bang! Down it comes. Pat runs; but, to his astonishment and mine, the *notaire* runs also and claims the bird. Pat, who does not understand a word of French (notwithstanding that he had then been living four years in the place), keeps backing up, and swearing in English, holding the partridge behind his back, whilst the old *notaire*, in a perfect frenzy, fumes and shakes his fist in his face.

I went up, wondering what the row was about.

"What is the matter, Pat?"

"Don't know, sir. Faith! but if he keeps on shaking his dirty

fat hand in my face, I will give the old gentleman one for his nob, I will!" exclaimed the irate Irishman.

"*Qu'y a-t-il donc?*" I asked the old boy then.

"*C'est ma perdrix!*" he exclaimed.

"Your bird!" I said in astonishment. "Why! I shot it."

"So did I," said he.

"Ah! well, in that case, though I have as much right to it as you, you may have it."

So I turned to the porter:

"Give the bird to this gentleman," said I.

"Sir?" he asked, with the most absurdly wondering face I ever did see.

I could not help laughing as I repeated my injunction.

"Shure, you shot it!" said he, with obstinate determination.

"Yes; but so did he, too. Give it to him, we will soon get some more. Never mind that one."

"He shot it too, did he?" said Pat, with a queer light in his eye; so I knew he was up to some devilry, and I watched him intently. He took out the bird, passed his hand lovingly over it, and took it to the old gentleman; but before he reached him, he dropped the bird, stumbled, placed his foot upon it, and crushed it completely.

"Arrah now, how unlucky I am, sure!" and he picked it up with such an appearance of sorrow on his countenance that it quite disarmed the old gentleman's anger.

"You d——l," said I, *sotto voce*, to him afterwards, "you did it on purpose! I saw you!"

"Well, sarves the old beggar right, too. There, sir; if you believe all they will tell you, all these French fellows, you will come home empty-handed; but I will take care of that though."

On we went. Bang! on my right. We stop and look. Bang! again. It is the farmer firing at a hare. He has missed it, and as it comes towards me, and fortunately the dogs are out of the way, I bundle it clean head over heels quite dead.

"This time," says Pat, "what is up with the farmer?" as that worthy came, panting and blowing, like one of his own thrashing-machines.

"*Je l'ai tiré le premier!*" he called out.

"Well, what of it?" I inquired; "you missed it."

"No; I wounded it."

"Very slightly, then," I said. "Had I not stopped its course, you would not have had it. Is the rule, then, to give up the game to him who first shoots at it?"

"Certainly," said the *notaire*, who had come up, with great marks of approbation.

"Give up the hare then," I said to Pat.

Pat did so, but looked at me with indignation, and kicked the farmer's dog out of his way. He never said a word; but his subsequent pantomime was rather expressive and suggestive, for he, quietly and behind my back, knelt on the ground, rolled up the game-bag very neatly, and put it carefully in one of his pockets, thereby implying that, to his idea, its services would not be required for that day at least. To tell the truth, I felt awfully riled. Just when I wanted to "bag," to be annoyed thus was more than I could very well bear; yet, what could I do? Good-breeding forbade me to speak out my mind; but I would have cheerfully given a trifle for leave to punch both the farmer's and the *notaire's* heads, if only for five minutes.

I was ruminating and brooding over my ill-luck, and walking up my beat rather sullenly, when bang! bang! from the farmer's gun again. Another hare, by all that is wonderful! That farmer has the knack of finding them: but as puss is evidently unscathed, the farmer is not *quite* so clever as he made out himself to be. Up goes the hare towards the hills, with all the dogs in sight after her; but she distances them easily, goes a wide round, and finally comes back again straight towards me. The farmer at once then started into a jog-trot towards me, too, to claim the hare again I presume; but I was not to be caught twice, and when she passed me I never offered to fire, but I merely took off my hat and shook it at her to increase her speed, whilst Pat, who at first, on seeing the hare coming, had snatched the game-bag out of his pocket and spread it wide open ready to receive it, looked up with wonderment at my not firing, and then, understanding the whys and wherefores; "Well, well!" he muttered to himself; "oh! but faith, this is good!"

"Why, monsieur, did you not kill it?" asked the farmer, who had come up to us by that time; "it was not too far!"

"No, it passed within twenty yards; but you know," I said laughing, "I do not intend to fill up your bag any more, especially on such a day as this!"

"I daresay he is wounded, too," he said.

"I don't think so," I replied, "but if he is, the dogs will have him." And as the dogs came back one after the other it was clear that it was a "no-go" with a vengeance.

After this little incident I had all the luck for some time, in this wise. It began to rain, and both my companions sought shelter under a tree. I put on my shower-proof long-coat, and

went on alone in fine style with my pointers, to the great mortification of my whilom companions.

"Pat!" said I.

"Yes, sir-r-r!"

"Run round, boy, as fast as you can tear, and drive back the birds; you see the dogs have 'runners' before them, most likely red-legged partridges, and if we don't stop their running we shall lose them."

I had hardly said the words when the ready-witted fellow was already halfway round the mangold field. I continued to advance, and what I expected happened. When the birds were headed they rose—at least, three of them did, and two of these came down. The rest of the birds, cowed by the detonations, were kept *en arrêt* in two places. I went up to the left dog. One bird rose, and I floored it instantly; then two more got up on my left, and I fetched one down a long way. On the right, a bird had gone, but as the dog there had not only remained unmoved but the other dog had gone to back him, I expected to make another "pot" there, but it was not to be. One of my companion's dogs ran up like a fool in the midst of the covey, much to our disgust, and "rose" them all one after the other.

"Pepper him, sir; pepper him," entreated the irrepressible Pat, and, to tell the truth, I had a good mind to do so.

Howbeit the dog got foul of one of mine, who was never noted for good temper, and the latter gave him such a thrashing as few dogs ever did have either before or since. He went back howling towards his master, and troubled us no more. I bagged three more birds, and there being a small thicket close by of about an acre in extent, I made up my mind to try it. Half the thicket had been cut at the beginning of the season, so that half the extent of the covert was not more than a yard or so high.

"First-class this place, sir-r-r," said Pat, "for them redlegs. My master always finds some here."

"Yes," I said, "but the rain may have driven them away from it. At any rate we will see. Just go round and stand at the corner, and when I get near you, whack about with your stick as hard as ever you can."

So saying I went in, but the dogs, though they did not decline following me therein, were practically useless, as they kept close to my heels, evidently all at sea. I walked clean down to the end within forty yards of Pat, who began belabouring the bushes round about him, but nothing rose. A hare, however, went past him, but I could not see it. We then began beating the other side, but we got to the end also with nothing; and I was wondering

why, when a covey rose from the dry ditch that was dug round the wood. I killed two at one shot, and missed with the second barrel. After that, we went in a ploughed field to look for a hare. I beat two sides with no result; but on the third, within fifteen yards from the corner, up went a large hare.

"Oh! my eye," said Pat, "here is a whacker!" and bang! over the hare went.

The weather had cleared then, and the shooters had resumed sport. I spied the farmer going behind a large and thick hedge, along which I was then beating; and there happened one of those little rogueries which the most honest man in the world will be guilty of, when he has the chance to practise them in the field. A partridge was flushed by one of the dogs, and when I fired at it, I noticed that half its tail flew off, and the bird, severely wounded, went down and down, passed the hedge, and fell there close to the farmer's feet. Nevertheless, when Pat went over for the bird, the worthy man told him that he had not seen it; whereas, at night, when the contents of each bag were exhibited, we found the very identical bird, easily recognised by its tail, among the contents of the farmer's game-net! So much for that sportsman's honesty. Yet, I daresay, if I had dropped a napoleon in the sight of the man, he would have picked it up and given it me back instantly; but picking up another man's bird is considered an excellent joke, and as such it is practised universally, and is handed down as a precious heirloom among shooters from generation to generation! What a queer thing human principles are!

Well, it was about three in the afternoon, and somehow we were then a goodly array on the wheatfields, I should say about ten shooters in a line walking down the plain, so that any game thereon was bound to come to light. Well, a half-grown hare started parallel to us, within sixty yards. We all fired at him, we all missed him, and it was a dog after all that killed him. But the remarks passed on the "misses" were certainly the most entertaining I have ever heard. Said one:

"Well, I could not help missing, my gun hung fire."

"As for me," said the second, "I made a mistake in the triggers. I always fire the right barrel first as a rule, so that pulling the left this time has upset all my usual knack."

Another one said that the sling of his gun was in the way. A fourth stated that his not bagging was not wonderful, as his gun was loaded with small shot, he having made a mistake when taking his cartridges. The fifth said he knew all along that his powder was bad; he fired, he said, merely because the others did. Another had stumbled over a stone; the seventh said he

was afraid when he fired, because the dogs were so near the hare; and the last said that the hare was too far.

I must, however, premise that at first, when we had seen that one of the dogs had collared the hare, everyone instantly said he had shot it, and asserted that the others had clean missed. And as they all said the same thing, I thought it would puzzle even a Solomon to unravel the mystery as it stood, and apportion the hare to the right killer.

"It is mine!" said one.

"Yours?" exclaimed another. "I saw your shot striking the ground five yards behind the hare."

"Why don't you say ten yards?" retorted the first one, crossly.

"Skin him," I said, "for verily I believe there is not a pellet in the whole of his skin."

He was accordingly skinned, and there was not a single shot in his body. He, however, being but half-grown, could not very well shake off all the dogs after him, hence his being caught. However, the excuses offered for the want of skill on the part of the shooters were quite on a par with those I heard subsequently in the evening, when the bags were being compared. One said that if his boots had not pinched his feet he would have been able to quarter four times as much ground as he had been able to beat, and of course he would, in due ratio, have had four times as much game as he had to show. Another man complained of his gaiters being too large; another of his coat, which fitted him too closely at the shoulders; a fourth said that whenever his dog got on point, somebody else would turn up, walk up to his birds and shoot them; the fifth said he had shot a tremendous lot of birds, only he had lost them all or nearly so, all being wounded, and his dog would not retrieve them. One said it was too hot in the morning, whilst another complained that it was too cold in the afternoon; then the wind was blamed, then the rain, then the sun which dazzled some; finally, the ground had to bear its share of the complaints; in one part it was slippery, in another it was thorny, elsewhere the stones were dreadfully in the way; so that had there been no rain, no sun, no wind, no thorns, no stones, no bad cartridges, and no bad dogs, we ought to have seen such a stock of game spread at night on the table, as would have decently stocked the whole *département*. But then these grumbles are not peculiar to the Poitevins. At home, does not one hear an excuse offered for every "miss" that happens in the course of the sport? We are all rather apt, when missing is the order of the day, to lay the blame on everything we can think of—on the dogs, on the state

of the atmosphere, on bad powder, on the barrels of our guns being dirty, on the slippery ground, on the sun; and depend upon it, someone will eventually turn up, who will lay the blame on the moon! Nobody is personally to blame in the matter. We are all of us so wonderfully clever (in our own estimation), that we could not admit such a thing as a hint, that, perhaps, he who held the gun did not hold it quite straight. Skilfulness is, to shooters, what common sense is to the generality of mortals. Every man claims to possess common sense, but how few do really possess it? and so it is for skill in shooting. Listen to a dozen shooters; they are one and all extremely clever with their guns, according to their own individual word for it; but out of the dozen, eleven are, it may be safely asserted, mild duffers, among whom two or three, perhaps, have occasional outbursts of luck. Howbeit, when any of these miss—and it does not matter how often they do so—they have always a ready excuse for it. However, since they are satisfied, *tout est pour le mieux*.

Well, when we had all re-assembled at the inn, and the bags had been officially examined, it turned out that the most successful amongst us had been the village chemist or druggist, a big man, about five-and-thirty years of age, with a neck like a bull and an apoplectic face, and accordingly he was elected "king." A young fellow, fresh from college, had come back *bredouille*, *i.e.* without any game whatsoever, and he was, ironically and amidst much laughter, appointed "butler to his Majesty."

"*Sapristi!*" Jean, thou art unlucky!" said the chemist to him, "for to-day's hard work has made me wonderfully dry, and as thou art bound to fill up my glass each time I call '*à boire*,' by Jupiter! thou wilt have to trot!"

"*Bon! bon!*" replied the youth, with great good humour, "I will fill my post *à ravir*, thou wilt see. It is but fair that I should do so, since I agreed to take part in the proceedings on the terms mentioned in connection with them."

Well, as the cloth was forthwith being laid, I left the room, and the first sight that met my gaze when passing the kitchen was Pat kissing one of the kitchen-maids, and, on the first floor, I just came upon the old *notaire* making *les yeux doux* to another maid on the landing! However, that was no business of mine, though I could not help smiling at the incongruous sight of the old man, who had been married I should say at least forty years, making advances to a girl young enough to be his great-granddaughter. He was rather annoyed, too, at this *fâcheux contretemps*, and eventually, in the course of the evening, he entreated me not to open my lips on the subject. I had however duly told the affair

already to Thomson, and he had as quickly communicated it to half-a-dozen more, so that *the little incident* was in a very fair way towards reaching the ears of the worthy *notaire's* old wife, and she, if report spoke true, was by nature rather inclined to be sour and spiteful.

The dinner was a tremendous success. But the thirst of the King was perfectly phenomenal. No sooner was his glass filled than it was emptied, and his stentorian calls for *à boire* fairly kept his poor butler the whole evening on his legs.

Towards eleven o'clock the fun began. "When wine is in——" You know the proverb. I heard there the most astonishing tales a shooter could hear without losing his gravity. There was, amongst others, a gentleman present who asserted that he had once made a bet with a friend of his that he would shoot six partridges under the following conditions, *i.e.* that he would walk up to the birds, flush them, take a pinch of snuff, and then shoot.

"Did you win?" I asked him.

"Of course I did," said he, swallowing another glass of wine; "I shot two more birds than we had agreed upon, just to show him what I could do."

After that I could hear any story, no matter how stretchy, without so much as moving a muscle. I was sorely tried, however, when the farmer began praising his dog, saying that he never missed a point, &c., whereas, in the morning, the brute had deliberately run up to my own dog's point, and set himself diligently about flushing separately every bird that constituted the covey.

"Why," I said, "do you really prize that dog of yours? If he were mine I would hang him instantly."

Thereupon, there was a burst of laughter from the listeners (for they all knew what a wretched screw the dog was), and the farmer was wild with indignation. He consoled himself by saying that *we* did not know all the animal's qualities, but *he* did. He was, indeed, clever, if he could see any.

Meanwhile, our dinner had been fully discussed and dessert had been placed on the table. A good percentage of the *dineurs* were then "three (and a half) sheets in the wind;" some were teasing one another, two were quarrelling, and one was singing "*allons chasseur*," &c., whilst another, who had kept his wits about him, was slyly withdrawing a glass of wine wherein the farmer was dipping a narrow biscuit, and substituted for it a mustard-pot. The farmer, who was still warmly discussing the merits of his dog, in the heat of the controversy never noticed the alteration in his commissariat department, and he went on dipping his biscuit in the mustard without looking at it; but when he put it up to his

mouth and had a bite, Jerusalem! what a face he made! And how he did swear!

Meanwhile the King had fallen asleep. This was no sooner perceived than half-a-dozen young fellows got up with great glee, and said they would take him home; but, to make matters safe, they first woke up the unfortunate druggist, and made him drink another large cup of *champagne frappé*, after which he was decidedly done for, so much so that he nearly rolled off his armchair upon the floor. The young fellows tried to wake him again, but that was an impossibility.

"Now is our time," said one.

And they lifted him up bodily, and carried him into the yard, with such bursts of laughter that I went to see what they would do with him. They placed him on a wheelbarrow.

"He lives close by," said someone to me; "we are going to take him home: come and see. It will be a lark."

Sure enough, they wheeled him to his own door, and there they propped him up against it, after which they rang the bell and then stood away in the middle of the road.

There was silence for some time. At last a light appeared, a window was opened on the first floor, and an old woman in her night-gown popped her head out,

"Who is there?" said she.

"It is your governor, Marie," said one of the young fellows.

"*Je descends*," she said.

And she closed the window, took up the light and disappeared; then we saw her coming down the stairs, and finally she began unbolting the street-door. This, however, opened quicker and more violently than she expected, for her master, who was a heavy man, was unconsciously leaning against it with all his weight, so that the moment the latch went up, open flew the door, and the chemist fell over the old girl, knocking her and her candlestick all over the shop, and falling a-top of her with a groan.

Rather rough play this, but at the time it was rather entertaining. The old woman was not damaged in the least though, for she got up very gingerly, roundly abused the perpetrators of the trick, after which she dragged her snoring master into the passage, and shut the street-door with a kick.

We then went back to the inn, and found the party breaking up; we had another parting glass or two, I don't exactly remember how many; all I can recollect is, that as we were going home that night (or, rather morning) I thought the hill was uncommonly steep,

and the house itself a good deal farther than I had imagined it to be until then.

Taken all in all, that St. Hubert *fête* was an enjoyable ceremony, and I shall never regret the few days I remained over my time in order to witness it.

CHAPTER XVI.

SALMON SHOOTING.

"What!" I hear my readers exclaim, *à l'unanimité*, "salmon shooting! Fishing, the writer means. It is a compositor's mistake, no doubt. Why the deuce don't those fellows pay more attention to their work? The proof-reader, at any rate, ought to have seen this," &c. &c.

But no, kind reader, it is not a mistake, and nobody is to blame; it is of salmon *shooting* I wish to speak, and now let us go into it at once. Mind, if ever anyone *was* astonished, it was your humble servant, I can assure you, when he witnessed the deed; and like you, when you read the title, he too rubbed his eyes in wonderment, being unwilling to believe his own senses at first, when he spied the executioner carrying on the execution.

Well, then, in the summer of the year 1871. I had taken up my abode for three weeks at an hotel at Ancenis, in the Loire Inférieure, France, and from hence I carried on fishing incursions and excursions all over the neighbouring streams, but particularly on the large river Loire, and I never limited the extent of my journeys up and down, going sometimes even as far as Nantes.

I had secured the exclusive use of a *bachot*, *i.e.* a flat-bottomed rowing boat—a mongrel between a wildfowling-punt and a fishing-punt. Uncommonly strong it was—very large, very heavy, but very roomy; and it would have been comfortable enough, had it not been that the too profuse tar in its sides was literally started from the seams by the almost tropical heat of the summer sun, so that we journeyed, when in it, in a tarred atmosphere so to speak. I am aware that it is a healthy smell and so forth, but I don't like it, and that is the plain truth. It seems that you are always in a calking-yard, and it is not nice, more-

over, to tar your light summer breeches each time you sit down either in the stern-sheets or on the sides of your craft, when, in the heat of your fishing, you forget the sticky condition of your boating concern.

My oarsman was a man of some forty summers, who rejoiced in the name of Bruneau, and who, notwithstanding his cracked wooden shoes and his only shirt, was the happiest devil I ever chanced to fall across. He certainly was the merriest fellow I have ever seen, and his wit and happy-go-lucky philosophy were perfectly catching. He was a sad rogue though, that Master Bruneau, and I am afraid he was moreover a great poacher, for he knew too many dishonest tricks to preserve his probity *dans toute son intégrité*.

However, that is neither here nor there. He never did me any harm—quite the reverse—and as his little failings and peccadilloes did not affect me, I always refer to him and to the time I was honoured with his company and had the benefit of his experience, with unmitigated pleasure. By profession he was a fisherman, *i.e.* he owned half-a-dozen wicker-basket "pots," which he daily made a practice of placing in sundry nooks and corners whose attractive powers for fish he knew well and of old, and when he had done that much he had done his day's work, and was satisfied.

Oh, the happy, lazy life this vagabond led! I watched him sometimes with an undefined feeling of envy.

He would start early in the morning in his *bachot* to lift up his pots, and, as per agreement, he would call for me at the inn. I was always ready. It was so jolly to be up at daybreak.

"*En route, monsieur?*" he would ask, with his face all aglow, when he had had the morning *goute d'eau-de-vie* which I invariably treated him to. Not that the drop would have inflamed his countenance. *Eau-de-vie* is too much diluted in rural inns in France to produce that effect on anybody, but the pleasure of being treated to it was to him a great source of satisfaction.

Then, off we would go down to the shore, and into the *bachot*. Then I would light a pipe or a cigar, whilst he placed my rods and creel out of harm's way, and he would then take his oars or the pole, and row us or shove us along, according to the depth of water under the bottom (I can't say keel there, for there was no keel to our craft).

Well, when we reached his ground he would land me somewhere at some good spot, and I would forthwith set my line going whilst he went to see what his "pots" contained. When he had visited them he rebaited and reset them, and then, shoving

his punt in the stream, he would lie down in it at full length, begin a lively ditty, and come down slowly just as the water chose to carry him, until he had reached my place.

I can now see him. His patched-up breeches had only one brace to hold them; sometimes he had that brace over the left shoulder, sometimes over the right, sometimes it was rolled round his waist like a belt; his shirt was wide open, and you could see his sunburnt chest and shoulders; his large straw hat had had half its bottom knocked off a season or two before; but he sang and enjoyed the warmth and the sun like a bird, and was never put out.

"Well, what luck?" I would ask him.

A fine carp, a jack, or several bream, eels, &c., according to chance.

Then I would re-embark, and we would go gudgeon fishing at a favourite spot of ours, or else over the sand-banks we would go, and Bruneau would spear flounders or soles, as he spied them half buried in the sand.

It was very funny to see him standing up in the bow, with his shirt sleeves turned up his arms, watching intently around, and shoving us slowly along with his pole, all the while. Generally, he handled the pole with his right hand and the spear with the left; for, amongst his other peculiarities, my worthy *batelier* was left-handed. When he spied a fish, whist! down the spear would go, cleaving the water swiftly and silently, and out would come the fish in all its beauty.

Of course, enthusiastic anglers on reading this will be disgusted, and I ought to have been too; at least, I have a faint idea that that would have been the proper thing for me to do; but the fact is I was not, and were I to be shot for it the very next minute, I acknowledge that I enjoyed it—there!

Somehow, in the waiting, in the watching, and in the skill displayed and knack needed for the performance of the trick, there was a something which intensely riveted my attention, and the fun to me was positively very entertaining. It certainly requires quite as much if not more patience, perseverance, and skill, to spear a fish in broad daylight as to hook any shy trout with a fly; and those who say that spearing under any circumstances is very easy, that it is poaching, and that as such it ought to be discountenanced, are certainly wrong in the first place, and if they are right in the second, then all I can say is, that sort of poaching (if poaching it be) is so very clever that it ought to be overlooked.

Well, I had been about a week thus lazily enjoying myself, and catching specially coarse fish, with occasionally a trout or a salmon

who *would* gobble up my bait, when one fine evening, as we were coming down the stream with a good well full of fish, what should I see but two men in a boat going leisurely over a bend of the stream, and one of the two, he who stood in the bows, had something in his hands on the ready that looked uncommonly like a fowlingpiece. A flash from the setting sun on the barrels left no doubt on that ground on my mind.

"Bruneau," said I, "what are these two fellows about?"

"On the watch for salmon," said he.

"What! And do they shoot any?"

"Of course they do," he replied, "when they can."

"But how can they manage it?"

Thereupon, Bruneau shrugged his shoulders and laughed. He was always delighted when he could show me a wrinkle.

"They go slowly about," he went on, "over such ground where a shoal has been noticed to go (for, sometimes regular troops of salmon are seen coming up the stream), and, when one comes up to swallow a grub or a fly on the surface of the water, the shooter fires at the eddy the fish makes, and generally hits it if he is experienced at the trick. The fellow who stands with the gun in yonder *bachot* is a clever man at that game. He is a lawyer from Nantes, and he comes over here on purpose for all sorts of sport. In winter-time I frequently take him in my boat up the river for ducks, and sometimes in summer-time, I have been with him salmon shooting too. Had I not been with you, it is more than probable he would have engaged me."

"What gun does he use?"

"A 16-bore. His usual fowlingpiece. In fact, it is the only gun he has."

"What shot does he load with?"

"Large swan-shot."

"How far does he shoot at the fish?"

"Ten yards is the utmost. Usually five or six yards, that is the proper distance."

"Does he generally bag?"

"Twice out of three or four shots."

"Let us go near them and see him shoot."

"We must not go close to them," said he, "it would disturb their fish. But we will get a little closer, and then we will watch them. Look! look! *Il va tirer!*"

I looked up. The man was aiming deliberately for a few seconds.

"That is where he fancies a fish is going to rise," explained Bruneau.

"But how can he know?"

"Oh! by the motion of the water, and sometimes he can even see the fish on the move."

Thereupon came a flash from the gun, a puff of smoke, and the noise of the explosion reached our ears, whilst the shooter's boatman, jumping forward, had laid hold of a strong landing net fixed to a stout bamboo pole, and had plunged it in the water. He in a moment hoisted it out, and a fine fish, I should say ten pounds weight, was in the net. The shooter had meanwhile coolly opened the breech of his gun, taken out the empty case, shoved in a new cartridge, and closing his gun was once more ready.

"Well," I exclaimed involuntarily, "that is the first time I have seen or even heard of such a dodge, and, by Jove! it is queer enough certainly; but I don't think much of it after all."

"Why, sir?" said Bruneau, astonished at that opinion of mine.

"Why? because there is no great skill required in it. It is a mere work of patience, and as the shooter fires when the fish shows itself he does not give it any chance to escape. To explain my meaning, were it not that occasionally the water causes the shots to glance away, every fish fired at would evidently be killed, and that is not sport."

"Ah, well, of course opinions differ," said the *batelier*; "but as for me, what I consider the sport in it is the bagging, and I never give any fish any chance to escape me when I can help it, I know."

"Then," I said, "you are a pot hunter, not a sportsman."

He shook his head with a bewildered air and said no more. Of course it was of no use arguing with him, for he would not have understood my arguments; so I merely concluded by saying that any fellow who could hold a gun could do as much as the shooter who was before us.

"Oh, as far as that goes," said my man, "that is true enough: for of an evening, when no gardes or gendarmes were about, I have often shot some salmon myself."

"Yet you could not shoot a bird flying, could you?"

"No, certainly not; leastways, I never tried, but I know I could not, and it passes my comprehension to make out how shooters can do it."

"Well, then, you see, since you acknowledge yourself that you are no expert at shooting, and yet you can shoot salmon, my conclusion was right."

"And what was your conclusion?" said he.

"Why, that any duffer could do it, and therefore that it is not sport; it is slaughter, nothing more nor less. Now, daylight spearing is sport to my mind, because it requires skill and gives the fish a chance of escape, for they see you, and can therefore avoid the spear when it comes down upon them; but these salmon do not see the shooter, and they are positively murdered without a chance being given them of using their means of escape. Those who are not hit have to thank their stars that the water prevented the shots from killing them, and that is the only thing that can save them."

Subsequently I saw the shooter, and in a friendly chat I endeavoured to convince him that my way of thinking on that subject was the right one, but *il n'y a pas de pire sourd que celui qui ne veut pas entendre*; and as he would not hear of it he was not won over, so that to this day I daresay he has been pursuing his favourite mode of catching salmon whenever the latter were foolish enough to give him the chance. Those occasions, I was glad to learn, are rather few and far between, at least as regards the river Loire; but he told me that there are many places where such sport (?) is carried on almost all the year round, and that a good salmon-shooter can bag his dozen in the course of a fine afternoon in such favoured spots. What splendid sport it must be to be sure! Quaint enough, certainly, for the idea of bagging fish with a gun is most decidedly out of the common. What queer devices these continental men do resort to occasionally!

SHOOTING IN ALSACE.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE.

Some six years ago, whilst staying with a friend at his shooting-box in Alsace, we got wind that a neighbouring shooting, whose capabilities were known to be A 1 to my friend, was to be had for the short remainder of a lease, *i.e.* only one year, and I forthwith declared my intention to secure it if it were possible for me to do so.

It was the village *garde champêtre* who had informed us of the fact, on his falling in with us as we were leaving the village for a day's sport, and I immediately proposed that he should accompany me to the house of the owner, and be there my interpreter. This *garde* had formerly belonged to the French army, where he had learned a little French, and although he could not help pronouncing his d's as t's, and his v's as f's, like most Germans, yet his knowledge, however limited, was sufficient to enable him to understand me, and this was all that was needed.

I accordingly left my friend with his own *garde*, and, accompanied by the *garde-champêtre*, I made my way towards a village some three miles beyond the hills, where resided the farmer, owner of the land. It was a lovely morning, and whilst on our way and without deviating much from our true course, I managed to bag two hares and a partridge. And, by-the-way, I must here pay a just tribute of praise and gratitude to the Alsatian peasants. Unlike the general run of French peasants, they are almost invariably, not only superficially civil, but really earnest in their endeavours to make you bag game; whereas in most other parts of France, unless you are well known and feared in the locality, the *paysans* make it a rule to mislead you in every possible

respect; such as denying that there is any game about, sending you on the wrong track if they have seen a covey rising, and purposely taking you away from your game if they can in any way manage to do so. Now, in the case under consideration, though I had never before been seen sporting on that side of the country, yet every peasant we met at work in the fields would civilly take off his head-covering as we passed by, and several of them actually came up on seeing I had a gun, and volunteered to guide me to a hare that they knew in her form, or to a covey of birds in their turnips. You would not catch a Norman peasant do that, I warrant you, though a Breton peasant might. Well, of course, though virtually out of our ground, I felt each time very much inclined to accept these very kind offers; and when the peasants were the owners of the land I went up with them, killed, as I said before, two hares and a bird, but I insisted upon the peasants taking the game. This so delighted them that they gave me there and then a general invitation never to spare their ground whenever I went that way. Now, I call such cordial fellows real sociable individuals to deal with.

Howbeit we reached the place we wanted to call at by 10 A.M. We found the good-wife at home, and she civilly insisted upon our walking in and having some refreshments. Her husband was out in the fields, and she directed a farm boy to accompany us. Ten minutes' walk brought us over a hill.

"There is my master," said the boy, pointing to a man at work with two oxen in a field.

So down we went, and we soon had arranged all preliminaries. It seemed that the lessee of the shooting, being called away by some business, was prevented from sporting that year, and there being but one year left for his lease to be run out, the farmer did not object to his sub-letting, provided the new-comer suited him; and in fact it was with him (the owner) that the arrangements were to be made. Well, he left his team of oxen in charge of the lad who had accompanied us, and he took us himself over the ground to show us the limits. The extent of the shooting was somewhere about 2,000 acres, and it included some small coverts and a 300-acre wood, always plentifully sprinkled with woodcocks in the season, he said; then there were some furze-fields on the hills, which were also tenanted occasionally by the longbills. Down the valley was a brook, running alternately under bushes and between small coverts, open fields, meadows, &c. This brook was always visited by roebuck, deer, &c.; and when the hounds were hunting the neighbouring forests, wild-boars frequently came over and stayed a few days upon the

estate to rest from their fatigues. Wolves came in bands in winter; foxes were rather more plentiful than he (the farmer) liked, and he would feel obliged if I would pepper them with buck-shot whenever I should chance to meet with any. This made me smile—the idea of shooting a fox was so outrageous to my ideas; but still I promised him that I would clear his ground of all sorts of vermin. He then took us to his next grievance—*i.e.* an old abandoned stone-quarry positively full of rabbits.

"These wretches," he said, "are our plague. You see no one has been shooting here yet this season, and if you only come round there to this oat-field on the hill, I will show you a sight worth seeing."

We went to the aforesaid oat-field, when I posted myself on the side towards the stone-quarry. The farmer and the *garde* then went quietly to the other side, and then shouting and throwing clods of earth, a regular stampede took place. I do not think I ever saw such a number of rabbits at the same time on the same road. I fired seven shots running, as fast as I could load, without moving a foot from the place I had chosen.

"You should trap the beggars," I said to the farmer, when he and the keeper came round again and we collected the slain.

"Well," he said, "I thought about it; but, as I let the right of shooting them, I don't see that I should act fairly towards my lessee if I should take to killing them myself."

"Well, no, perhaps not; but then such a lot of them must be an intolerable nuisance. However, they won't bother you much longer now, and you will soon perceive a notable decrease in their numbers, I warrant you. I will bring over my ferrets to-morrow, and I will stake my gun to a tobacco-pipe that at least forty of them will come out of the stone-quarry for good, and never go in again. Well now, what about your terms? for we have not so far said a word about them, and that is not an unimportant item in our proceedings, I imagine."

"Well," he said, "Mr. ——" (the preceding lessee) "pays me two hundred and fifty francs per season."

"Two hundred and fifty francs!" I exclaimed, in utter astonishment at the cheapness of the thing, but the owner evidently mistook it for an exclamation of surprise on hearing high terms, for he added quickly:

"But you know there is with it a little house, where the sportsmen used to take their meals and sleep occasionally."

"Let us see the house," I said.

It was situated half-way up the hill, amidst a cluster of trees, and it was not such a very small house as I had been led to

expect by the manner in which the farmer had mentioned it. There were three or four bedrooms, and two sitting-rooms, kitchen, &c., a yard, a garden well-stocked with vegetables and fruit, &c.

Now, although I had no intention whatever of coming to inhabit the place, yet it was very nice, as a place of shelter and rest; for nothing I abominate more than having to resort, under any pretence whatever, to the country inns of the Continent, where one has to eat one's meals often in the same room with a lot of fellows who are smoking bad tobacco, and expectorating vehemently.

Of course I clinched the bargain at once, and for fear of any misunderstanding, when we had walked back to the farm, we ourselves drew up the agreement on stamped paper; I paid my £10 in advance, got my receipt, and everything being thus satisfactorily settled, the farmer's wife insisted on our staying to dinner, after which we made tracks for home. It was evening then, and from ever so far I spied my friend standing at his gate, and evidently looking out for us.

"Well," he shouted, when we were as yet fully fifty yards from him, "what news?"

I waved the papers, and shouted back with great glee: "I have got it."

We discussed the whole transaction at length that evening, and we resolved without loss of time to start very early the next morning for the place, and sport on the ground.

"It will be for us a second *ouverture*," said my friend, "for no gun has gone over that ground as yet."

So we sat up till ten making cartridges and getting all things ready, and to bed we went.

Very early in the morning, when all was still dark, Fritz (my friend's keeper) came up to my bedroom, and as he shook me in my cosy bed, and held his gigantic lantern in my face, I felt very much inclined to kick the lantern in the fireplace, and worthy Fritz down the stairs.

"It is nearly daylight, sir," he shouted in my ears.

"Oh! bother the daylight," I retorted gruffly.

"We must start soon. Come, sir, come! You said I was not to pay attention to all your grumbles, and you would give me a two-franc piece if I woke you up well in time, and I mean to earn my two-franc piece!"

And so saying he jerked off all the clothes from my bed.

"You confounded villain!" I shouted out in great wrath.

But when I stood on the floor he had bolted outside, and was holding the door ajar.

"That is right, sir, now you are up."

"Yes, in more senses than one, as I will soon let you know," I grumbled, as I picked up my bed-clothes, intending, I firmly believe, to turn in once more.

"If you do get back to bed," he said slowly, "I will have to do my duty and pull you out again."

This woke me up altogether to a sense of reason, and I accordingly resigned myself with a half-confused idea that I ought to be very grateful to the obstinate fellow, who had carried out my orders of the previous night so faithfully and well. I was always noted for an unwillingness to rise before the sun was up; in fact, I generally make such arrangements as will preclude any necessity for so doing, but in the present case my friend's wishes had induced me to agree upon starting very early, and therefore, to make sure that I should get up in time, I had given a hint to Fritz right well to the purpose, as the reader may see.

Did you ever, reader, get up in the darkness of the night, and did you then breakfast by candle-light? If so, don't you think with me that there is nothing more cheerless and more lugubrious? You don't eat with half your usual appetite, your head aches slightly, and you feel chilly. You are almost inclined to give up the sport, in order to resume your sleep, and such a sentiment is not at all conducive to your being well pleased with yourself or with the world at large.

Well, it was in no very pleased mood that I took my seat in the dogcart. The dew was falling heavily from the leaves of the trees that surrounded the house, and the air was very keen, so that heavy greatcoats and rugs were mighty acceptable things to us.

Fritz brought the dogs out, and placed them in the box of the cart, where a plentiful supply of straw had been got ready for them, and in it they soon made themselves snug and comfortable. Then the keeper jumped on behind, and off we went at a rattling pace.

Now, though the distance to the shooting-box across the fields was but three miles, by road it was fully six or seven, as the roads, of course, were made to pass through all the intervening villages. Daylight was appearing on the horizon when we pulled up in the yard. There we were met by Jacques, the *garde-champêtre*, who had come over by arrangement to see about the place and set it in order. He had lighted a good fire, of which we took advantage to get prepared a second breakfast.

At eight o'clock we began operations in earnest. To keep my word with the owner, we went first towards the stone-quarry.

Fritz had the ferrets in his coat pockets, and carried my wire-haired terrier, Pincher, on his arm, for the young devil if let loose would no doubt have traced unto himself a line of conduct diametrically opposed to the one we might have wanted him to take. Of all the fiery dogs I have ever seen he was the fieriest. I never saw the like of him yet for bolting rabbits or hares from thickets or furze, and his speed and dash were so great that, though he was not more than twelve inches high, no rabbit had a chance of escaping him the moment it took to the open, however small might have been the ground.

Our plan of action was first to take our positions where I stood the day before, but forty or fifty yards apart, whilst Fritz would take the terrier on the other side of the field, and there let him loose to bolt the rabbits, or at least those among the rabbits who had not as yet thought fit to return to their holes. Of these we could clip as many as we could whilst on their way, and when the ground would be cleared, we would then go to the quarry itself, and ferret there until dinner-time.

This programme we carried out to the letter. We had brought with us only one of the other dogs, an old retrieving pointer of mine, who was up to every move on the board, and in whom we could trust implicitly.

Well, my friend and I noiselessly took up our stands, and Fritz went round; there he let go Pincher, who, without more ado, having found "a road," dived instantly among the standing crop, and began such a scaring of bunnies as gave us plenty of work for the next four or five minutes. And there the old pointer came very handy, for those rabbits that were but wounded would have undoubtedly managed, in the majority of cases, to regain their holes, and there to get in and die, without anyone being the better or wiser for it. But the old dog, after the first two or three runs, stationed himself on the direct way to the rabbits' stronghold, and then nabbed all the "lame'uns," as well as one or two who certainly had never been fired at, as they dashed by. Pincher himself collared three or four as he bundled them out unceremoniously from their feasting, and, altogether, this wholesale *déroute* was a great treat.

We had in all fifteen slain after this, our first onslaught. We collected them, and Fritz secured Pincher before that worthy was aware of the fact, else he would doubtless have strongly objected to that course being pursued; but he was such a wild harum-scarum sort of a dog, so totally devoid of anything like obedience, and so full withal of wilful mischief, that there was no controlling him in any way when he was loose. That is one of

the great defects of the breed when employed with the gun. They get so fond of the sport that they are perfectly regardless of anything but slaughter, so that threats and blandishments are alike wasted on them, and nothing but absolute bodily mastery will insure anything even like passable obedience to orders. Well, when Master Pincher found himself duly secured in a slip he turned awfully nasty, and forthwith wished to extemporise a fight with Fritz. That worthy, however, was equal to the occasion, and fetching the doggy a slap across the head that sent him head over heels, the dog rose, convinced that retaliation would be, perhaps, dangerous, and made up his mind, moodily enough, to say no more.

We then approached the quarries. Several mounds of rough slabs were heaped here and there, near the entrance to the place, ready for loading I presume, and as I walked by I saw unmistakable signs of their being much frequented by the rabbits.

"We had better try these," I said to my companion. "If you like to stand at this one I will take the next."

So saying, I took from Fritz my polecat-ferret and walked off to my mound of stones, where I put it down at a likely "gallery," and, cocking up my gun, I ordered the pointer out of the way.

Meanwhile Fritz had put down the little white doe-ferret at his master's mound, and soon the fun began. My ferret had not been in more than a few seconds when terrible squeaks issued from his whereabouts, and at the same time out bounded a rabbit on one side and two others on the other. I fired and killed one. Whilst reloading, another rabbit came out, and him I also bundled over satisfactorily. Still the squeaking went on all the while, quite uninterruptedly, and as no rabbits came out I made up my mind to find out the state of the matter with the, to me, invisible squeaker. Bang! on my left from my friend. Bang! again, whilst I remove the slabs of stone with all speed; and then, sure enough, I come upon the squeaker, who might well squeak, poor fellow, for the polecat had fastened his jaws on his thigh, and holding him thus fast, was sucking his blood away. I took them both up, and unfastening the thirsty ferret, let go the rabbit, and as he was scampering away I sent after him an ounce odd of No. 6 shot that put an end to his career. The ferret had gone in again, but soon came out. I took him up then and laid him at the next lot of stones, when another bunny, who had elected to domicile therein, received from him a summary notice to quit that was immediately attended to.

We went on thus until we had cleared all the outlying likely places of refuge, and then we searched for the strongholds in the

quarry itself, but there we met with quite an unexpected visitor in the shape of a full-grown dog-fox. How it had happened that he had remained there so still, considering all the firing that had taken place close to him during the whole of the morning, I am not prepared to decide; but there remains the fact that he was there, and had been there all the while that the *fusillade* was going on round about his stronghold.

Well, this is how it happened that we came to him. I was peacefully ferreting a deep hole, and as peacefully bundling over its inhabitants as they came out, when my friend, who was on the other side of the quarry, suddenly popped up his head above some rocks and shouted out to me:

"I say!"

"Well, what is it?"

"The doe" (ferret) "won't go in the hole where we are!"

"Then there is a polecat in it, you may depend," I shouted back, "and she is afraid of it, for she is a little one, you know; but if you will send her over to me I will let you have my black one; he is a d——l, and he will clear the hole of whatever is in it, I will warrant!"

There I was mistaken, however; but of this more anon. I must not anticipate.

Well, Fritz, according to my friend's orders, brought me the doe. I gave him the polecat. He went back with it to his master, and I resumed my ferreting with the white one. After a minute or so, up again comes my friend's head.

"I say!"

"Well, now what's the matter?"

"The black one——"

"Well?" I asked in some trepidation.

"Well, he went in——"

"Ah! I knew he would."

"Yes, but he came back at once, and now he is all bristles, and he won't go into the hole any more."

"What the deuce can there be in the blessed hole!" I thought. I picked up the doe and went to look. There was the hole—a very large one—and there was the polecat, all bristles indeed, like a hedgehog, but he would not face the place again. Pincher, however, was pulling on his slip with all his might towards the hole, and he was greedily whimpering in that indescribable manner which tells plainly that there is something out of the common, and that the dog is anxious to get at it. The old pointer, too, was there, standing at the mouth of the hole with his head on one

side, and ready to pounce on its inhabitant as soon as it would show itself out.

"It is some vermin of some kind," I said, "you may depend upon it; I wonder if the terrier could get at it; however, we will soon know."

I let go Pincher, who instantly went to ground, and there began such a snarling, growling, spitting, grinding of teeth, and biting as we had never heard before. I was going to stoop before the hole and try to pull the dog out, when, growling, snarling, and tearing at one another, out came a gray and red bundle composed of the fox and terrier, so much mixed up, so to speak, with one another, that it was impossible to hit the one without hitting the other. The pointer, however, made no such mistake, and the moment the bundle popped out he selected the reddish portion of it, and both he and the terrier did so well that in half a minute the worry was at an end, and the fox was no more.

Poor Pincher, what a mess he was in!

The pointer escaped with a bleeding ear and a torn neck.

The fox was a magnificent fellow, and its skin is now at the foot of my friend's bed. Fritz marvelled greatly at the little terrier's pluck, and he subsequently paid the little dog far more respect and attention than was his wont previous to the encounter.

"I have never seen such a thing before," he remarked. "I have seen our dachshunds pulling down scores of foxes, but then they were at least seven or eight of them to have a go at him. I have never seen a single dog drawing and holding, single-handed, a fox like that."

And I know for a fact that the worthy keeper was so filled with enthusiasm about the feat, that he surreptitiously got very nearly all the village female curs intimately acquainted with the wire-haired wonder, and I don't blame him. We should always make our harvest while the sun shines, and lay hold of chance and time by the forelock.

Howbeit, whilst we were washing clean the dogs' wounds at a pool close by, who should turn up but the owner of the ground. His joy at seeing the now dead fox was unbounded, and he would hardly believe us when we told him how it had been killed. He took Fritz aside and severely cross-examined him, after which, evidently satisfied with the *bonâ-fides* of the affair, he came to me and made me what seemed to him a splendid offer for the dog, viz. *vingt-cinq francs* (£1) and a bottle of wine! The honest *fermier* was much chagrined when I declined, and, no doubt thinking he would tempt me, he offered me four shillings more! It was really laughable.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

WHEN back home that evening after supper, as we discussed the events of the day and the prospects of further sport for the future, we came to the unanimous conclusion that the first thing to be done was to secure a keeper in whom implicit confidence could be placed.

Now, so far as this last condition is concerned, I am glad to say that Alsatian keepers have well deserved their renown for a more strict, more honest, and more sober set of men it would be hard to find; indeed, the generality of the Alsatian fellows are so; but there are always some black sheep in the villages, and when a shooting is so thickly interspersed with small and middle-sized coverts, it is urgent and necessary that someone should be appointed to do the rounds morning and evening.

We discussed the *pros* and the *cons* of the question at length, and I could not help asking how it was that I should have to enlist the services of a keeper, whereas my predecessor had had no need of one during the many years he had held the shooting. It seemed rather strange, but the explanation given me soon convinced me.

"The fact of the matter," said my friend, "is that the lawyer, your predecessor, being commissioned with most of the crop sales by auction of the department, was too much feared by the rural fellows for them to even think of poaching over his ground. They knew that he could always eventually retaliate upon them a hundredfold; his power to do so was self-evident; and as he was naturally a very spiteful man, everyone took care not to annoy him. There was a man who tried it on once or twice, a small landholder. He was soon denounced to the lawyer, who forthwith placed him on his black list, refused to sell for him, and when the man attended someone else's sale, the lawyer took good care to

make him pay a good price for his lots. Auctioneers can always do that much when they choose. And so the man had soon to reform and mind his own business. With you as lessee, however, it is a totally different affair. Nobody knows you or fears you as yet, and though, as a rule, the peasants are free from poaching, yet there are always some adventurous spirits who will poach for the love of the thing; therefore, you must fairly expect that as soon as it will be known round about here that the shootings have changed hands, and there is no keeper, some men will try to kill your hares *à l'affût*, or to net your birds."

I felt the perfect truth of my friend's arguments.

Now, it is astonishing what a difference it makes in a man's way of reasoning when circumstances become, in any way, materially altered. Before I leased this ground I resided at my friend's house, and shot over his land with him. Well, he used to fume awfully at times, when a shot or two were heard on his land in the dead of the night, and I then used to play the part of a sorry comforter by telling him that "he must expect that sort of thing, you know; nobody can prevent that. Fellows will poach, &c., therefore the best to be done was to accept philosophically what could not be altogether prevented." But now the parts were slightly altered as concerned myself, and I confess that it was with an unmistakable start that, as we were driving home that night by moonlight, I had heard the bang of a heavily-loaded gun sounding on the border of a 200-acre wood close by the roadside.

On the impulse of the moment, Pincher had jumped out of the cart and bolted with all speed towards the spot. Had it not unfortunately happened so, we would have undoubtedly caught the fellow (or rather fellows, for there were two of them). They had only one gun, however, and we saw them distinctly running up the hill towards a village, and disappearing behind a hedge.

After a quarter of an hour's whistling, shouting, and fuming, the terrier turned up, and lay on his back in the middle of the road, wagging his tail all the time.

"You wretch!" I said, "you deserve a good licking, you do!"

"He! he! he!" whined the dog.

"Well, get up and come in then."

Up he was, like a bolt from a catapult, and jumped in. Off we went. The next day I arranged with a hedge-trimmer and woodsman to be my keeper, and the very same night he caught the two men we had seen the night before. Legally, though, I could not

then prosecute the two miscreants, for my keeper had not as yet taken the oath before the magistrates, neither had we had time to get his commission *en règle*, but nevertheless, the two men got a terrible fright over the affair, and they gave up their nocturnal visits to the coverts. Moreover, the news soon spread that someone had been appointed to watch over the land, and no one ever interfered with it, except the neighbouring shooters in their rambles, when they occasionally overstepped the limits of their ground and came over mine some little way. This I overlooked, on the proviso that *we* should be allowed the same privilege over our neighbours' lands, and we never had a difference.

Alsace has always been renowned for its fair stock of game, and where preservation is strictly looked after the sport becomes quite first class. By first-class I mean that there is as much game as is compatible with the extent of a ground where no artificial rearing or restocking is ever resorted to. In short, what there is, is the natural product of the wild stock in liberty; no one feeds them or breeds them, or imports strangers to let loose among them. The consequence is that the birds are thoroughly wild, and therefore they afford the highest fun in point of sport in its true meaning, for they make up by their wildness for their small numbers, as compared with those places where hand-fed birds are turned down. As for hares, their number was astonishing, and when we first began our regular *tournées* over the ground I was amazed at the quantity we saw. We frequently shot a dozen in a day besides other game. My friend was a rare adept at finding them, and I was a good one at killing them. The division of labour (of love) was quite entertaining to me, but not quite so to him! Strange it was, that on three hares which he had actually kicked up from their forms, he generally missed two, whereas partridges, woodcocks, or pheasants were done for the moment they hove in sight within range of his gun, but hares or rabbits he almost invariably missed.

"I cannot understand," he used to tell me, "how it is, but there is the patent fact that I do miss them repeatedly."

I consoled him by telling him that it was rare for a man to be good all round on all sorts of game. Foresters get first-rate on ground game, but are all at sea, as a rule, in the open or in a marsh; and on the other hand a quail or partridge-man, or snipe-shooter, is sadly bothered in a wood. That is all a matter of habit, and to remedy any of these inconveniences I take care, when I shoot, to have a little of everything if not much of it.

Of course I am not going to enter into minute details of all we did that season, it would be taking an unworthy advantage of my

patient readers; but I will merely relate whatever may possess interest to a shooter's mind, and I will also describe several queer expedients much *en vogue* in Alsace in the pursuit of game, and in the catching of small birds, such as fieldfares, starlings, blackbirds, thrushes, &c., for the markets.

First of all, as regards woodcocks, the process was quite new to me. I had heard before of the *huttes à bécasses*, but what these might have been, or where situated, I was fairly at a loss to imagine. The idea of a hut for woodcocks, of all birds the most erratic, appeared to me very singular and very original.

One day as we were at a covert side waiting for a shot, I got one which I did not expect as it was so early yet in the season. The dachshunds were in but mute, and in their rambles they flushed a woodcock. The bird I saw well, rose about fifty yards from me and flew straight towards me; of course I shot it. That was the first. Nobody had even seen one as yet that season.

"Meinherr," said Hans, my keeper, who was standing beside me, "now that the passage seems to have begun I think you will have to go to the hut one of these evenings."

"And where is the hut?" I said, looking round in my innocence.

"Behind that hedge in the hollow," he said, pointing somewhere down the vale.

"We will go and see it when the dogs clear out of this," I said.

And we did. And to my astonishment Hans took me to a stagnant pool of water, on one side of which, facing the coverts, was a hole dug out into the high bank, and still roughly covered over with a few withered branches of the willow tree that grew beside it.

"The hut," remarked Hans, laconically, "sadly wants some repairs. I will see to it to-morrow morning."

"Oh!" I said, pointing to the hole; "that is the hut then?"

"Yah!" and he looked at me.

"And a very pretty hut too," I remarked dryly.

"It is a very successful one," said Hans, who all along did not see that I was joking; "the lawyer always bagged two or three birds whenever he came to it."

"But from what I have understood, the lawyer is a very big man; then how could he get into this hole?" I asked.

"Oh! but it is larger than you think, meinherr—much larger. Why, the lawyer always had his dog in it too with him."

"Then, by Jupiter!" said I, "I will try it."

Saying these words, I crawled in. There was a turf seat at the

bottom of the concern, and thereon I sat. When thus ensconced the roof nearly touched my head: in fact there was hardly an inch or two to spare, and there was no room anywhere but between my knees and feet for a dog. On the right side I saw a hole dug close to the elbow, and in it I found a tinder-box and a pocket-pistol still half full of cognac. On the ground and stuck in the earth, through being trodden on by hobnailed boots, were some feathers, woodcocks' unmistakably. This sight wound me up, and I readily expressed my intention to come that evening and try my luck.

"You see, meinherr," said Hans, "the hut faces the west, so that up to the last moment of daylight you can see the birds coming from the covert."

Yes; the place was remarkably well chosen, and if there were any birds about they were bound, some of them, to come that way.

"There are two more similar huts," the keeper said, "but they are quite on the other side of the hill, and they are not so good as this one. This is the best in the whole country."

I need not say that it was with a great deal of pleasurable excitement that towards evening I wended my way towards the spot. There is always something peculiarly attractive in waiting in ambush for game. True, it is not, strictly speaking, sport, but it is rare fun nevertheless, and as good as a *battue* any day, and withal better fun than killing birds that are driven in flocks over one's head.

Well, the afternoon had been lovely though the morning had been showery, and now the sun was going down in all its glory, and a few woolly clouds alone were overhead. A better chance of seeing the birds there never was, and I expected great fun. As I had, however, at the time no dog I could trust to remain with me quietly until I fired and told him to go, I went by myself all alone. I took my seat, cocked up my gun, and made myself easy and comfortable. All was still, but far away in the distance some hounds were giving tongue. They, however, soon stopped. The sun went down, the shadows of the night increased, but the sky in comparison retained a startling brightness.

As the time for the passage drew nigh I grew quite enthusiastic. I hurriedly looked at my watch. It was getting late. Ah! there is a bird coming. I shoulder the gun, but the bird when he gets near enough for a shot gets out of sight, as he flies on a level with the foliage of the not far distant wood. I peep and look. Lo, the bird has flown quite over the pool, has landed on my side of the water, and I could now knock him down with the barrel of my

gun! He does not seem to see me, and struts about. What a strange appearance all these long-billed birds have at night, so weird like and so queer! I am lost in a perplexed amazement as to what is best to be done under the circumstances. I really do not know what to do. Lose the bird after having seen it I can't very well make up my mind to. Shoot it where it is I would have blown it to atoms; besides, I would not murder it so whilst on the ground. Flush it I did not dare, fearing to lose sight of it as I had done before. Altogether I was awfully bothered.

"When such things happened, as they must occasionally have happened, to my predecessor," I thought, "I wonder what he did?"

Whilst I was deep in these perturbed thoughts, the woodcock quietly opened his wings, and leisurely flew over the water, evidently with the intention of settling on the other side. Whilst on this short journey, however, he offered me a beautiful mark, with his spread wings flitting over the smooth water that reflected the clear sky, and bang! I nailed him.

I tried to get out with all speed in order to pick it up; but not being as yet thoroughly accustomed to the narrow dimensions of my momentary domicile, I got my head into the roof of foliage, and nearly carried the whole away on my back. However, I extricated myself, and was just going down the bank on the other side, when I spied a long lanky figure coming towards me at a run.

"Now, who the deuce is that?" I thought.

It was Hans.

"Meinherr!" exclaimed he, breathlessly, "come quickly!"

"What is the matter?"

"A wild-boar, meinherr! quick, quick!"

I snatched up my gun and we started double quick.

Chemin faisant, Hans, who lived not far from covert, told me that one of his children, who was employed as cowherd at one of the neighbouring farm-houses, had just startled him on his return home that evening by telling him that he had met a great black pig at the brook.

"I questioned him closely," said Hans, "and he said that the pig, as he called it, grunted at him when he saw him, and turned his head towards him, and he had two long teeth sticking out of his jaws by the side of his snout. Of course the boy did not know what it was, being so young; but I came at once to fetch you."

"You did very well," I said, "and if it is indeed a boar, I will make a nice present to the boy."

We soon got to the brook, but for some time we could find no trace of the animal. Fortunately the moon had risen, else we should have had to give up the search.

"Here he is," said Hans, in a whisper.

"Where?" I asked him.

"There!" and he pointed to a thick bush, where soon a series of portentous grunts gave us warning.

"He is going to charge us," added Hans, very quietly, "so *sauve qui peut*. I have no gun and I am *un père de famille*, I must take care of myself for my children's sake!" and he bolted behind a tree.

Now, had my gun been loaded with bullet cartridges, I would have felt rather insecure; for night shooting is so deceptive that it takes, then, luck as well as skill to place a bullet where it ought to be, in order to stop such an animal as a wild-boar; but I had loaded with two strong cartridges, containing each half-a-dozen large buck-shot, and at close range I felt sure these would prove a "stopper." The boar, meanwhile, instead of charging moved away; but I was not to be done out of him, and I started after him down the ravine. He stopped on hearing my footsteps and faced me, and I verily believe he was just getting steam up for a *charge à fond de train* into me, when I sent my twelve pills into his face. He groaned heavily, and fell quite dead. I was about ten yards from him when I fired, and on inspection, we found his head quite shattered.

"I can't carry him alone, meinherr," said Hans, now in great glee, trying to lift him up by its hind legs.

"Oh! I will help you," said I, quite cheerily. "Here, tie up his legs firmly. Right. Now put a branch through. Ready? Now then, one, two, three!"

And up we lifted the body, and shouldering each one end of the perch, we marched him off triumphantly.

About a week after, being at a shooting party, a gentleman related that he, his huntsman, and his hounds had led a boar a pretty dance on that day, and that they had lost him somewhere in our neighbourhood.

"Darkness set in," he went on, "the boar got into some shallow stream; remained in it quietly; the hounds lost his scent, and being knocked up pretty nearly, they did not bother much about finding it again, and we had to sound the *rappel*, to couple them, and trudge home empty-handed. It was a *ragot*, and he must have weighed somewhere about 150 lb."

"Not quite so much as that," I said laughing.

At this, every one present stared pretty well except my friend,

who knew it all, and had even eaten his share of one ham of the animal, as Cockneys are wont to say.

"Your boar," I went on, "weighed exactly 130 lb., and if you would like to taste him, you are welcome to call upon me and do so."

Thereupon the greatest hilarity prevailed in the assembly.

"But confound it!" said the *chasseur aux chiens courants*, good-humouredly, "I had made up my mind that that boar should die from my hand, and now he is no more. Alas! *Ce que c'est que de nous.* He is dead!"

"Yes, he breathed his last about an hour, I should say, after you had abandoned him as lost."

CHAPTER XIX.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

Even now the reminiscences of these shooting adventures, though they have taken place some years ago, fill me with pleasurable delight as I evoke their incidents in my mind. The chain of thought, however, is a peculiar one. One thing brings on another —some pleasurable, others the reverse; but all have a powerful hold on my feelings, either as a sportsman or as a man. I have noticed with pleasure in *Bell* that my articles have amused a writer who signs himself "Leatherhead," and his notes on the wire-haired tribe have on the other hand interested me. His queries as to the dogs we employed only entail upon me a very pleasurable task, that of giving their description.

I had, as I stated in a previous chapter, an old retrieving pointer that knew about every trick that could be advantageous to his master; I had, moreover, Pincher, the wire-haired terrier, who was, as "Leatherhead" fitly remarks of the breed, a host in himself; I had secured four thoroughbred dachshunds that I had seen at work, and my friend owned seven dachshunds, two boarhounds, and a setter.

As regards dachshunds, by-the-way, pretty theories are ventilated nowadays, by some men who lay claim to being thought *connoisseurs*. Not long ago a dog judge stated as his opinion that the dachshunds' forelegs ought to be straight (!), and that dachs were by far too slow for hunting! Hunting! of all things in the world! Who ever thought of hunting with dachshunds? They would be just about as fit for hunting (on horseback, as I understand hunting) as pug-dogs would be for coursing! Committees of dog shows ought to ascertain well the qualifications of their *employés* before engaging them, for when one sees in print the opinion of a judge that dachshunds ought not to have crooked legs, and that they are too slow for hunting, it sets all dachshund

owners laughing, and makes both the judge and his shows objects of derision and fun. That ought not to be. But, then, why will men judge classes of which they know nothing or very little? True, committees would have some trouble in securing the services of a dachshund sportsman, for two reasons: the first of which is that there are but few British shooters who have ever shot game pushed out by dachshunds (and some of these dogs may have been curs, for the breed is deteriorating in some countries); secondly, few sportsmen care to mix themselves up with anything so unsatisfactory as the judging of a show turns out to be occasionally; hence the dearth of competent men to judge peculiar sporting classes. At the same time, the conceit of any man declaring what a dachshund ought to be in his opinion, and that opinion contrary to the knowledge and in direct opposition to the requisites of thousands of practical men, who spend their lives hunting their native forests with this carefully-preserved and highly-prized breed, is vastly amusing.

And as to the would-be depreciating notice, that these dogs are too slow—their slowness and truthfulness constitute their worth; they never were intended to carry on their game as fast as fox-hounds, and a dachshund who should be so fast as that would be perfectly useless, and therefore would very speedily be given away, sold, or shot; and that is why dachshunds are so much prized, and why their crooked legs give them the advantage over any other breed of hounds.

Any good hound will oust a four-footed quadruped from a covert, but if the said hound drives his quarry too fast he will be useless for shooting purposes, because the shooter will not be able to place himself on the quarry's route in time for a shot, and he may thus waste season after season in fruitless endeavours to bag anything. But not so with the thorough crooked-legged dachshund. He goes on the scent so slow and so sure that he rarely loses the line, and pushes out his game so safely and so slowly that his voice warns you of the line taken, and prompts you what gap to watch in anticipation long before the hunted animal makes his appearance: for it is a fact that any hare, roebuck, deer, or wolf tracked by slow hounds takes the matter very coolly, and frequently stops to listen to the voice of its pursuers, and to ascertain whether they are still on its track or not.

Our little pack of eleven dachshunds was the direct cause of our killing two or three hundred hares, half-a-dozen wolves, a score of roedeer, three stags, and four wild-boars in one season.

Where, I should like to know, is the pack of any other breed of hounds that would have allowed our two guns to do so well?

No. Dachshunds thoroughly up to their work and to their breed are as safe as can be to bring their quarry to the gun, and compatibly with possibilities, they rarely lose it, except under extraordinary circumstances. Generally speaking, it is merely a question of time and of knack in the sportsman, for these little hounds will hold on what they have found until it is shot or they have pulled it down themselves. That is, of course, when the sport is practicable, for everybody who has shot or hunted with hounds knows that there are days when scent will not lie well, and one also occasionally meets with game up to an extra move or two.

Thus, we had a big hare, as tricky as she was old, who twice put the dogs at fault, and that within 200 yards from her favourite covert. There was an old hedge growing on both sides of a low dry stone wall, and on one side of the wall was a small ditch, nearly filled with the loose stones that had tumbled down from the wall, and here and there in the ditch were shallow pools of water. Well, the first time that hare broke covert, before we had had time to get into position, she evidently was near the border of the wood, and bolted before the hounds had fairly found her. We saw her bolt, and Fritz instantly ran to her line, and imitating a hound's voice, and pretending to follow it up, the hounds came to the line, owned it, and went on their way rejoicing. My friend kept in the valley and I took the hill. Fritz kept up with me, and when we were halfway up the hill a call on the horn from my friend made us turn round. The hounds were at fault. We all went to the spot. "Whah! whah! whaoh!" were the dogs going on, uneasily loitering about the hedge, and throwing up their heads now and then.

"The hare passed here to a certainty," said my friend, "but where? That is the question."

We looked and cast about, knocked and kicked the bushes. Finally we agreed that she must have slipped away, and the scent had grown cold.

A day or two after the same hare played us the same trick with the same result; but the third time I placed myself in ambush near the spot, and when I saw her coming I levelled my gun at her, but thinking I would like to make out how she managed to escape I refrained from firing, and saw her deliberately go down into the ditch, then wade through the wet parts for half the length of the hedge; when there she jumped clean on the wall, and then trotted to the end, where she squatted and stopped. The hounds came up as usual, and remembering, no doubt, their previous fruitless searches at that very same spot they did not

trouble themselves much, but some actually gave up the moment they reached the ditch, and began drinking without any further fuss or bother.

"Well, now," said my friend, when he came up, breathlessly, "have you not seen the hare?"

"Yes, I did, but I wanted to know where it went, so I did not shoot."

I took him then to the end of the wall, where, on the stones and partly hidden by the bushes, was puss, thinking she was very safe, no doubt, for she had never attempted to bolt.

My friend went back, and putting one of the dachs on the wall, the hound began giving tongue instantly. Some of the others thereupon took the wall by storm, whilst the rest kept pace with them along the ditch, and out went puss with a ten-foot jump clean into a ploughed field and with all steam on. She led the dogs a two mile round, and they ran into her close to her own covert.

I have seen another cunning hare, but this was when coursing, not long ago. Three times my greyhounds coursed that hare, and three times they lost her at a brook. At last I watched the game, and found that she stopped abruptly on her side of the brook, whilst both greyhounds cleared it, being in hot pursuit, and of course they looked for her in vain on the other side.

But, to come again to the dogs we had, I have already said enough concerning the dachshunds, for what they do for a hare they will do for any other wild four-footed animal.

Some people seem to think as the word dachshund literally translated means "badger hound," that dachshunds are used exclusively for badgers. There never was a greater mistake. When a badger is accidentally discovered, of course the dachshunds hunt him down to his stronghold and kill him there if they can: but let me tell my readers that very few dogs can kill a full-grown badger, especially when alone and face to face with him in his place of refuge, and that dachshunds, in spite of their extraordinary pluck, have to try more than once, and have many a sound round with the badger ere the latter gives up the ghost.

However, this sort of thing happens once upon a time, and there are only a few professionals who hunt on purpose for the skins of badgers, foxes, &c., with dachshunds. But for one or two such men, there are hundreds of shooters who use dachshunds for the legitimate game quadrupeds—*i.e.* animals fit to eat, and occasionally for foxes or wolves when they are troublesome. For foxes these little hounds will manage pretty well by themselves, for they hold tight when once they have got hold at all,

and their number soon tells on their foe. But when a wolf is on the *tapis* that is another affair altogether, and the same may be said when wild-boars or stags are concerned, for then, if the hunted stag or boar or wolf be not speedily shot and killed it will maim and sometimes kill one or more hounds. This, however, never cows the others (dachshunds are proverbially fearless), and if you do not back them up quickly they will all try their jaws at the quarry and get mauled in turns.

I will tell you what I have seen. Both Jacques, the *garde-champêtre*, and Hans, my own keeper, had turned up one evening late in December, and told us that a wolf had settled for the night in the largest wood.

"He is dead beat," said Hans, "and I think the *louvetiers* have been after him, for I heard a *cor de chasse* at nightfall sounding the coupling, and Jacques says he saw the huntsmen going down the road towards the town."

"We will be at him early in the morning," I said, and my friend told Fritz to see about all being ready in time.

After supper we went to the kennels, and saw our little dogs rolling about in heaps of fresh straw, and with that contented air of well-fed hounds satisfied with their lot. The next lot was the two boarhounds. These were chained up separately to different kennels, for they would have devoured one another if they had had the chance. These two dogs were to my mind a cross of bloodhound, mastiff, and deerhound; they were, beyond contradiction, the most ill-favoured dogs I had ever seen, and their reputation did not belie their appearance. Fritz alone had anything like tolerable command over them, and they were never let loose when hunting but when the quarry was at bay. Strange to say, when thus let go they never found fault with the dachshunds, though the latter frequently quarrelled with them when the quarry was killed, for possession I presume. On the other hand, the biggest, named Bull, invariably licked there and then his comrade if the latter approached near enough for a tussle.

On the next day off we went, the two boarhounds being led separately and the dachshunds packed.

Jacques had got four men from the village to watch round the wood all night, and they assured us that the wolf was in.

And so he was, for no sooner had the hounds been uncoupled and freed that they gave tongue almost at once and dashed under cover. Within two minutes, "Whah, whah, whaoh!" on an extensive scale sounded in the old wood, and the merry music strung us up for our best.

"Run, sir, run," said Fritz, "the wolf is going towards the farm!"

I went at top speed and reached the corner. A glance round assured me that I was in time, for the ground was very open. Presently the "Whah! whah! whaoh!" came thundering my way, and I caught sight of the wolf merely trotting and with his head on one side, glancing contemptuously towards the little hounds, and occasionally showing his teeth. He came out deliberately, but catching sight of me he lowered his head in the sneaking manner belonging to his tribe, and stretched himself out for a spin.

Bang! Instead of hitting him in the shoulder as I intended, the bullet broke his thigh, and never shall I forget the scene.

He flung himself on his side, and tore at his own wound with his teeth with such fiendish rage that I fairly stood aghast. Before I could fire again the dachs were on him, and at them he went, pitching them heels over head one after the other, and yet not one gave up the contest, but, badly hurt or not, came back or somehow crawled back to the rescue, and the wolf was literally covered with them, gnawing him and tearing him to the best of their abilities.

"Let go the big dogs!" I shouted to Fritz, in great alarm, for I was afraid for our little pack.

The two fierce hounds had heard the conflict, and their struggles had prevented their being freed sooner; but now up they came side by side, with their eyes starting out of their sockets, and they passed me like a whirlwind. Regardless of anything but the wolf, their onset upset the whole lot heels over head, dachshunds and wolf, and fairly laying hold they gave a wrench and all was over; but their blood was up then, and the way they bit through and through the now dead body was a "caution."

Then they had the usual "row" among themselves. Bull, the biggest, planted himself over the carcase, and bristling all over and showing his more than respectable *carnivora*, he offered there and then a challenge to all comers. This effectually put a stop to any farther mauling that the carcase would have undoubtedly undergone at the teeth of the pack and of the other hound.

When Fritz, my friend, and the men turned up, Bull and the other boarhound were secured, and then the dachshunds examined. Five were *hors de combat* for the time being, and the six others badly torn. Bad morning's work this. But it could not be helped of course. I ought to have placed my bullet a little higher towards the head, but then I am no *artiste* at rifle work, and I had done my best.

However, the hounds soon recovered, and a few weeks after they were all again as right as the mail. They never had been so

good as they were then for wolves, for the remembrance of the onslaught stamped on their minds an undying hatred for the breed, and whenever a wolf was signalled in the neighbourhood, we always gave the dogs an opportunity of showing their talents in that branch of their calling.

A good many illustrations have lately been published in which the breed is more or less faithfully delineated. The greatest drawback to engravings being satisfactorily referred to is that no one can judge of the markings of hounds by an engraving, and then when dogs are drawn by themselves it is impossible to form an idea of their stature. Trees of course are there, but trees cannot form any point of comparison, for there are trees of all sizes: so that to form an accurate idea of a dog, the dog ought to be painted, to begin with, in order to give an idea of his markings, and then a man must be seen near him. Of course there are men of all sizes, but I contend that if the picture is artistically done the face of the man and his general appearance will pretty accurately indicate his size, and by deduction the dog's size will be made apparent at a glance. There have been copies of a German picture lately exhibited rather extensively at some of the London fine-art dealers' galleries, where dachshunds may be seen true to life. The picture is called "He lies like truth." By the side of the shooter are three dogs: one is a setter, lying on the ground asleep or pretending to be; the two other dogs are unmistakably genuine thoroughbred dachshunds. One sits near his master on the same seat and looks up to him; the other one, on the ground, also stares at him. Any admirer of the breed will do well to study this picture, and he will see in it—Firstly, that the real genuine dachshund is awfully crooked in the forelegs. Secondly, that he is wonderfully short-legged, and very long-barrelled. Thirdly, that the colour most prized by those who know and use the breed is the black-and-tan. I do not pretend to say that the red dogs are bad, but they are not valued so highly as the others, and if there be nothing in colour, why do we make such a fuss about colour in our own pointers and setters?

There are provinces in the south of Belgium, whole kingdoms and grand duchies in Prussia and many departments in France, where hardly any other dogs are used with the gun. A forester *qui se respecte* has always two or three or four dachshunds about his place, and they constitute all his stock-in-trade as regards shooting-dogs.

Besides the German picture to which I have alluded, there are numbers of French sporting tableaux where the breed is very faithfully depicted. The dachshund is after all merely the French

CHAPTER XX.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

I THINK it was Buffon who stated in his *Histoire Naturelle* that dogs, as animals, are as unlike other animals as can be, inasmuch as they know only one master to love and obey; and that as friends, unlike our human friends, whether we remain rich or become poor, it makes no difference to our dogs, and they persistently remain with their masters to the last. This last part occurs in the *Éloge du Chien*, and no man ever stated a truism more forcibly, and in a more heartfelt series of sentences than those which constitute the dogs' eulogium, from which I conclude that Buffon had dogs which he loved, and which dearly loved him.

There is nothing in this world that can be compared to the blind affection of a dog for his master.

Whatever may be the man's defects and shortcomings, it does not seem to matter to his dogs, and they put up with anything rather than lose him. A puppy, with whose good looks you were taken and which you have brought up, trained, may be, with the punishments necessary in every course of training, grows up to look up to you as upon all that is good, all that is to be loved, to be friendly to, to be consoled or protected by; in fact, you are, to your dog the universe. When you are with him, all is as it should be; hunger, cold, privations of all sorts are put up with then, as a matter of course; but let the master be away, and though the dog may have plenty, and be well taken care of in all other respects, he whines for his master, is restless, wanders to and fro, *comme une âme en peine.* What matters to him then the presence of tit-bits, the company of friendly strangers, his warm room, his comforts? these he declines to enjoy; he will not touch food, he will not rest, he cannot be comforted, he pines for the company of that one man without whom life has no charm for him.

If this is not love of the very best brand I do not know what

is. I am no sentimentalist, but I acknowledge that there is something in that love which has always moved strongly the fibres of my heart when it has been addressed to me. When, then, an animal that loves me so much, that to him I am all in all, is taken away from me from whatever cause, I feel as deep a grief as if I were parted from all that is dear in this world. Of course, men who keep dogs in kennels away from them, who never see them but in the field, cannot expect love from those dogs. Dogs must be made constant companions, or else they cannot evince such a strong attachment as that which I have been describing. Yet there are men who expect that a dog will take to them readily, though they possibly have never previously paid him any attention, and if he refuses they are disappointed. This is silly. Dogs are instinctively averse to strangers, and being very sensitive, they do not forget in a hurry the last faces in order to take up with new ones.

Still, dogs occasionally evince attachment to comparative strangers. I have experienced such cases myself. I have bought dogs both at home and abroad, which required no coaxing to remain with me; but then there was the gun, the smell of game about the place, and these, to sporting dogs, are very strong incentives to forget all other things. I have also, when shooting over dogs, in company with two or three friends, got eventually all the dogs working for me, ranging for me, and retrieving for me, even what their own masters shot, and in spite of the said masters' threats and blandishments. This I explain, without implying that there is anything peculiarly attractive in me personally, simply in this wise—that as, when in the field, I spare no trouble in order to find game, as a natural consequence the dogs find that there is more fun with me as a shooter, and consequently follow me, not for my sake, but *for the sake of the gun that fires most*, irrespective of the man who holds it. In sporting dogs, the instinct for sport is so strong that momentarily they forget, in its prospect, friends and bodily wants alike.

Most good shooting dogs can neither eat, drink, nor rest, if they see that their master is getting ready for a stroll in the fields with the gun. I have never had one which did not show strong excitement the moment he saw me with the gun, and I have had some secured in order to keep them at home, that would try all they could to free themselves, and if they succeeded would track me anywhere, it did not matter how far, and instantly assume their proper functions.

Most of my dogs, if not all, would do without their breakfast if it was brought them at the time I make my appearance, and we

have to guard carefully against anything assuming the promise of a day's sport if we wish the dogs to have each his fair amount of food.

Here, by-the-way, I must protest against the fallacious and selfish system employed by some men towards their dogs, *i.e.* that of working them all day on an empty stomach. Such men aver that the dogs have thus a better power of scent. It may be so, but I doubt it, and certainly I should think that a dog kept without food to make him keener-nosed had a hard taskmaster to deal with. I do not think, certainly, that a dog ought to be crammed with food before he starts, but I say that a moderate meal makes a good foundation for a day's work for dogs as well as for sportsmen, and a moderate meal does not interfere with the dogs' power of scent or with their lasting capabilities.

I always treat my dogs as I treat myself. They breakfast if I breakfast; and when in the field I sit down in a sheltered corner for a snack, we all share and share alike, and, if anything, my dogs get the better of the sharing division. Why! it is worth a guinea a seat to see your two or three pointers or setters gravely sitting before you, and each becomingly eating his sandwiches as he gets them, well knowing that they are his regular perquisites; and as to the sandwiches interfering with their power of scent or clearness of wind, my candid opinion is that it is all nonsense.

The great secret to make a dog a friend is to treat him as a friend, and I pity the man who does not think the friendship of a good dog a desirable one. The man who loves and pets a dog cannot be a very bad sort either, whatever may be his shortcomings in some respects, and I would rather put my trust in such than in your cold-blooded people who cannot bear a dog near them.

Well, my little Pincher was not only my liveliest companion then, but my most constant attendant too. He used to sleep in my bedroom and wherever I went he came with me. It did not matter where I slept (and one has to put up with queer people occasionally on the Continent), I felt safe when Pincher was at hand, for I knew well enough that I could sleep *sur les deux oreilles*, *i.e.* as soundly as I liked, no one would come to disturb me that was badly inclined towards me without getting into a mess with the terrier. As concerned servants, friends, &c., he of course never bothered himself, but he would allow no strangers near me the moment I had left the floor and entered my bed.

In winter-time he used to sleep on my bed, but, however sound asleep he might appear to be, he had always, seemingly, at least an eye and an ear for all that was going on.

The worst of it was, I could not get out if he had seen me getting ready unless I took him with me, whether I had a gun or not. We used to lock him up then when I did not want him, and he was kept locked up until my return, when his company was once more desirable. But after we had treated him thus two or three times, he used to watch what was going on with great assumed indifference, and if he saw a gun got ready, or the lace-up boots brought into the room, or the cartridge-belt being filled and the game-bearer getting the bag ready, that was enough for him. He would forthwith bolt, and wait on the road two or three hundred yards from the house, ready for our passage. If we were driving, and it was still dark, he would get under the cart and run there close to the horse's heels all the way, noiselessly, unknown to us, and the first greeting I got when getting out of the dog-cart would be my poor little dog's. Well, who could punish him for that? Or who could blame him either? The trick was so cunning and the pluck so great, that I had not the heart to whip him, though I always "blew him up," there and then. But, bless you, all the while he would lie on his back, looking so piteously unhappy, that I sometimes gave up the thing as a bad job before beginning.

Several times when I had managed to get out before he was aware of it, he, as soon as he missed me, hunted the place thoroughly about, and although some doors might be closed he would sniff under them and that was enough, I was not there. Then he would make up his mind to escape somehow, and if no street-door was open and he could get at a window, he would go clean through it, smashing the pane to atoms, and find out where I had gone.

At bolting rabbits he had no equal, and single-handed he would catch them very cleverly if they gave him the least chance. I never saw a quicker dog, and his pluck was really wonderful, considering his size. He would face anything which one might reasonably have expected him to decline. He would beat any brambly covert, however thick—no thick furze bush had terrors for him; and the sea in its wildest storm did not deter him from trying to go into it, if a bird was there down, and he had seen it fall.

Strange to say, he retrieved birds well and tenderly, but hares or rabbits he would not bring an inch, though he would lead you well up to them wherever they were lying dead.

I do not know if the breed has been much used by shooters, but all I can say is that this dog evinced the acutest power of scent I have ever seen dogs of his size exhibit. In many of my

rambles I have had him as my only companion, and he proved always a host in himself, inasmuch as it did not matter what it was, from a hare down to a water-rat, from a pheasant down to a lark, he would find and bolt or rise any living thing that he got wind of.

His only defect, in the latter part of his career, was his insubordination when brought to fur. Somehow he seemed to fancy when he had come across a rabbit's trail that he was bound to kill that rabbit. That is what made him such a first-class rabbiting dog; but if he chanced to hit upon a hare instead, then there was no knowing where he would go in pursuit and when he would come back. I have known him for three hours after a hare, and of course he did not catch it after all; but he kept on demurely and indefatigably, just as if he thought he could catch it and kill it single-handed. If, however, a hare was badly wounded, the dog was sure eventually to overtake it and kill it, when he would come back, all wriggles, and lead me to it with alacrity. So long as he did not come across fur of any kind he was as good as a first-class spaniel for beating a covert or a hedge, keeping well within range even in the open.

I remember well the astonishment with which I was viewed at Havre, the first season I shot there, when I had taken only Pincher as my companion because I intended staying but a month or so. The idea of a man going out deliberately to shoot over turnips, bogs, covert, and stream, with a terrier for his only companion, seemed so preposterous that many of the *chasseurs*, when they first saw us, put us both down there and then as rank duffers. But, *ne leur en déplaise*, we soon altered that opinion, and I, with my little wire-haired devil, bagged as much by myself as all the other fellows with their tribes of lurchers and half-bred droppers.

I never could explain satisfactorily why Pincher would return alive even small birds if they were shot over him, and yet would tear away at rabbits and hares until they stopped moving for ever. Of course, as regards hares, it was quite out of the question that he could have retrieved them; some were nearly as big as he was, and nearly as heavy, but rabbits were not so cumbersome, and why he would not pick them up and bring them passes my comprehension. Habit is everything, and practice makes perfect. Never were such proverbs better proved than by that dog's behaviour. Whenever I go to the seaside I make it a point to take at least one gun with me, and every day after breakfast I have a stroll on the sands or over the cliffs for a shot or two at birds or rabbits. When I first took Pincher of course it was for that rabbiting process, but eventually, when the tide receded and

the sands were bare, I saw a lot of birds about there, and went down to have a shot at them. The dog at first tried to chase some gulls that were sweeping quite low, but I reproved him, and besides, seeing the uselessness of his attempts, he soon gave up all that riot. I taught him then to keep quiet and steady, and the first bird I shot fell on the sand some hundred yards from me. I felt perfectly convinced that the bird would be in a pulp before I could reach it, as Pincher got on it like a shot, but to my astonishment he picked it up and brought it to me alive, and as sensibly as any old dog might have done. Henceforth, I trusted him for birds. Stay a moment. No. Not all birds. He would never pick up and carry a jacksnipe. He would smell it, sniff at it, and flinging himself upon it, he would roll over it over and over again, in spite of all the anathemas I hurled at his devoted head. That was one of his peculiarities. The next one was, he could not brook a strange dog coming near him when he was carrying, and several times I laughed till the tears ran down my face to see him put down a bird, bristle all over and growl portentously at some of my friends' big retrievers (twenty times his weight and size), when the latter happened to go near him whilst he was performing his self-allotted duties. Alas! now all these antics of his are over, poor Pincher!

This is how it happened that he came to his end. We were covert shooting, and I was walking up a path towards the open; we had had very fair sport at woodcocks, and had bagged a score or so of wood-hares (you know those particularly red-furred hares, that look so much like large dead leaves when they are in their forms at the foot of trees), and we were particularly elated at the fun. Pincher was doing covert for me, and I had lost sight or rather sound of him for a minute, when in a large bush I heard him whimpering. I turned round, a hare appeared just bolting straight away from me; I saw an opening forty yards away, and cautioning Pincher by shouting to him to "Look out!" I fired. The hare rolled over, but simultaneously the dog uttered a dreadful yell of agony. I could not see him, but my heart smote me and I hastened forward.

When a man has been night and day for four years with a faithful and intelligent little dog, he cannot hear calmly the said dog complaining, from whatever cause, and I acknowledge that I felt just as concerned as if my bosom friend had been hurt. Unfortunately the covert there was so thick that I could not see him, and he evidently was trying to get still farther away from me.

"The poor little fellow," I thought, "fancies I have shot at

him purposely," and I was the more anxious to be near him.

"What is it? What is the matter?" called out my friend. "Here is Pincher crawling by, as if his back were broken."

"Lay hold of him, stop him, for goodness' sake!" I shouted back; "I have hit him by accident and he thinks I have done it to punish him, since he won't let me get near him."

Worthy Fritz next met my gaze. He held the little dog in his arms as tenderly as if it had been one of his own babies, and said he:

"Master, he is done for. Poor doggy!"

The little dog still crouched away from me, when I got near.

"My poor Pincher," I said, and I believe I was ready to weep. I could not speak any more, I took him in my arms, when, feeling that I was not angry with him as he feared, poor little fellow, he wagged his tail very faintly, his eyes sparkled once more, and he died licking my face.

I went home there and then, carrying him in my arms. I put him on my bed, and fell into a very dark series of thoughts. It is an astonishing thing that human beings are so constituted that our actual grief always appears to us the greatest that can possibly affect mankind, and I grieved over my now dead little friend and companion more than I should care to acknowledge. I passed in review everything of note he had done during his short life, and I felt I had lost—no, not a dog—a friend, a real friend—there! and I would not have cared if I had given up a dozen of my so-called friends, if I could only thereby have given again to my poor Pincher that breath of life that had just left him.

I daresay such thoughts were very foolish, but I felt then just as I have been relating. It was fortunate the accident arose from my own hands, for had anyone else shot the dog, I really do not know what I should have done.

I once saw a pointer bitch shot accidentally, and her owner on the impulse of the moment would have shot the author of the accident, if we had not interposed at once and remonstrated with him.

Now, to people who buy their dogs for the season, and who sell them when they have done with them, such a fuss will no doubt appear very silly. But, let lovers of dogs come forward, and let them state their opinions on the matter, and a widely different tale you will hear. "A dog is a dog," say cynics. No doubt, but a trusty and faithful dog ingratiates itself so much into

your feelings that his loss is felt very acutely. I speak from personal experience in the matter.

Now, for instance, my friend's boarhounds, Bull and Wolf, from the nature of their temper, might have been thought very cheaply held in my friend's and his keeper's estimation. But just the reverse was the case. Whether it was that they liked those two fierce dogs all the more on account of their ferocity, I am not prepared to decide; but there is one thing certain, my friend held both dogs far above his pack of dachshunds, and as for Fritz he fairly idolised those two demons. You should have heard him expatiating on their strength, their speed, their wonderful pluck and courage. When he related some of their adventures, he went into the merest details of their battles with such a glee, and such evident respect for the dogs, that his feeling towards them was as nearly love as could be.

In fact, it is not the dog's temper, appearance, or manners that endear him to his master, it is his real worth that stamps him as a fit friend and trusty companion. To me, my Pincher embodied in his ten or twelve pounds of flesh all the courage, pluck, and sterling worth of the enormous dogs that were Fritz's friends and companions. I warrant it took just as much *cheek* (and more, if anything) for my little terrier to go and tackle a big fox in his earth, as for the two big hounds to do battle with a bear or two at the market-place on a fair day, or to tackle a wild-boar *dans sa bauge*. They certainly showed great pluck in their way; but, if anything, I certainly think Pincher deserved the palm.

Poor Pincher! Peace to his ashes!

We buried him in the garden, at the foot of an apple-tree, and, as Fritz expressed himself on the occasion, when filling up the little grave:

"He vas a verry goot little doc, and a verry brafe little doc!"

And so he was. Poor Pincher!

CHAPTER XXI.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

I HAVE often been struck with the peculiar train of thoughts that almost invariably arose within me when finding myself quite alone in the vast Alsatian forests and woods.

So long as we are in company we wear (if I may so express it) an assumed air, either of *froideur* or of jollity, which is in most cases at variance with our individual temper and constitution, but which nevertheless irresistibly carries along with it a similarly artificial way of thinking.

But let the company be removed and our facial mask fall off; our thoughts turn spontaneously upon ourselves, or upon our surroundings; we reassume, unconsciously (that is if there be no disturbing influences at hand), both our genuine physiognomy and our natural ways of thinking. I need not say that both of these exhibit a startling difference with the artificial ones.

Well, I have noticed that under covert this reassumption of one's nature takes place more spontaneously than anywhere else, no doubt because the feeling of being quite alone, unseen and unobserved, leads us, unconsciously to ourselves, to drop all artificiality. Whenever I have been thus situated, my thoughts singularly enough always reverted to one of Erckmann-Chatrian's books, called *La Maison Forestière*, in which a young artist, Theodore Richter, indulges in some poetical thoughts about the origin of beings, and like this artist I have somehow fancied that though alone (as we define the term in our conventional way), I might not have been quite alone *de facto*, and that, in truth, inanimate nature, as we are pleased to call it, may not be intrinsically so inanimate as all that; and such was my enthusiasm at the beauties of nature that, like Theodore Richter, I really believe I should not have been overwhelmed with astonishment had one of the venerable trees thought fit to break its long silence in

my favour, and I believe I should also have then cheerfully exclaimed :

"*Monseigneur le chêne, je vous salue!* Let us talk of sublime Nature, our common mother. You must have made an abundant provision of ideas on that important subject ; what think you of the universal soul, *monseigneur le chêne?*"

Soberly speaking, if really (as materialists tell us) there be no soul in nature, how is it that most men, and sportsmen not least of all, when given up alone and without being disturbed to the many wonderful influences of nature, reflect on their faces some wonderful powers at work within? I have seen men looking at the covert-side or under covert, when they thought themselves alone, as they looked nowhere else. I have seen some really hard men allowing themselves unconsciously to be softened by their surroundings, and the expression of the physiognomies of some, which were naturally harsh and forbidding enough, were actually relaxed into an approach to kindliness and openness of heart. Now should a man be often brought in contact with such softening influences, he is bound actually to be changed thoroughly by nature's surroundings. From this may be inferred that there must be something there, really more powerful than strictly unconscious and inanimate nature.

I know some people say it is conscience which is at work within ourselves. Granted. But what induces it to do so? Silence and solitude. Very good. If so, then shut yourself up in a closet, where silence and solitude reign supreme, and see if you will feel any the better for it either in mind or in body.

No ; there is nothing like the open air, and nothing like the surroundings of nature, to effect anything like a thorough examination of one's powers and conscience. My most worthy resolutions have been suggested to me when alone shooting. If then this contact with Dame Nature (as the poets have it) really makes a man, mentally and physically, a better fellow-being, for the sake of the community if not for his own, every man ought to be or to become a sportsman, or at least a lover of nature.

This digression has been originated in my mind by the remembrance of my long and ever-to-be-remembered excursions alone in the great woods and forests of Alsace, when I invariably noticed this subtle but powerful influence of nature acting on my own organisation. I always felt happier, stronger, and better in every way when rambling under the old trees ; and there was in those happy sensations something far more refined than the mere satisfaction of being engaged in a favourite pursuit. As regards the influence of nature, particularly in large woods, I imagine that

almost all men must experience it, consciously or unconsciously. Even the uneducated Alsatian peasants feel that influence without knowing its origin. They all say that they are never so content as when they enter the woods.

Now to sport once more. Since I have just been mentioning the peasants, I may as well describe several peculiar ways of theirs as regards catching birds, and also how poachers set about snaring hares and rabbits as I have seen it done by them; as their plan differs in some essential respects from the British poacher's system, it may not prove uninteresting. It rarely happens that snares are set in Alsace as ours are, viz. the wire fastened to a small peg, which is itself secured by a string to a stronger peg deeply shoved into the ground. In Alsace the wire is merely fastened to a long, thin, but wiry branch from the bush near which, or under which, the hare is known to pass. When the wire is rigged on, the slender branch is bent down under a right-angled peg thrust into the ground, and so disposed to hook it, keep it down, and at the same time hold the snare in the hare's road. Now, when the hare passes there, whether leisurely or not, she puts her head through the loop; she feels the wire, jumps away, and by so doing she not only tightens the noose round her own neck, but slips also the branch from under the hook that held it down. This branch is no sooner released than it acts like a spring, and resumes its original upright position, and of course in so doing it lifts up the hare from the ground and hangs her in the air, there to kick and die. By-and-by comes the poacher, who, from a distance, can see whether his plan has succeeded or not. It not uncommonly happens, however, that the keepers are waiting close by in ambush and nail the fellow; for if the hare thus hung up offers an easily recognised proof of success to the poacher's eyes, it also, not unusually, catches the eyes of the keepers as they are going their rounds.

Still, in Alsace, it is only round the rich demesnes that some poachers in spite of all will carry on their calling. Rabbits are caught in a similar manner. As regards woodcocks, the loop is made of horsehair, and the branch which is to act like a spring is a mere twig. Partridges are caught in the ploughed fields, when a place is baited for several days beforehand, and then thickly covered with lines and nooses. But, as I have already stated, poaching is not resorted to openly by anyone from the villages, for it is not looked upon favourably even by disinterested persons in Alsace.

Of course there are some men everywhere who will try what they can get, especially if it be unlawful, just for the fun of the thing, more so, perhaps, than for the spoils; but this adventurous

spirit causes no great damage, and is very soon repressed by fear. What is more to be dreaded is organised poaching, such as that practised in England by gangs who professedly are nothing more nor less than thieves, who rob preserves instead of setting themselves to work.

I do not know how the game offences are now punished in Alsace under the Prussian Government rule.

The French laws which ruled there previous to the annexation were severe on poaching, but their application and enforcement were left so much in the hands of the communal authorities, that it was very rare to hear of a man belonging to the village where he had been caught being punished, unless the authorities had a spite against him, when his case was clear. But practically this power of conviction being vested in the testimony of an official alone is, to say the least, unfair to the public. True, a good *garde*, as a rule, would consider twice before writing out a *procès verbal* against an offender when he is not quite sure of his identity, but a young keeper in his zeal would go at it hammer and tongs, and if he thought he had recognised the offender, though he had not actually collared him, he would swear to his identity, believing, I daresay, that he was the man; and if the accused could not bring at least two good witnesses to swear an *alibi* in his favour, why, he was done for. Keepers are extremely jealous of their rights and privileges, and an Alsatian keeper cheerfully watches night and day; his heart is so much in his work that he finds no pleasure in anything else. Hence the *chasses réservées* were indeed well preserved. If anything I rather fancy, now that the Prussians are there, that the shootings will be still more strictly looked after. In fact, anything more disheartening to wilful or unwary sporting evil-doers than the Prussian or French codes of laws and police regulations is impossible to be devised.

I used to "kick" awfully whenever I got into any "mess" with officious Government spirits, and once I had to bolt after licking a *garde-champêtre* at the corner of a wood. I sent him a sovereign afterwards, and we were henceforth very good friends, but at the time of the row I felt bitterly enraged with him. There were plenty of birds, but for some reason or other he would not let me go on, but insisted that I should walk with him to the mayor's house, three miles, because I picked up a bird in a clover-field, thereby having made myself liable to a thaler fine.

"Here is your thaler!" I said, shying it to him; "now let me alone."

But he would not, and finally he actually made a clutch at my collar, intending to lead me off thus a prisoner. I did not quite

see it in that light, and we had a short controversy, which ended in his getting a black eye and a bleeding nose, when he went back for assistance, and I went my way.

Now I don't call a nation civilised where an illiterate brute, incapable of understanding the spirit of his orders, has the power to march off a gentleman who has stepped three yards into some clover to pick up a bird he had shot, as if he were a scoundrel of the conventional "deepest dye."

As regards small birds such as fieldfares, starlings, thrushes, blackbirds, &c., the markets are always well provisioned with such by the village fellows, but of course they do not shoot them. It would not pay them to waste loads of powder and shot for birds, which at most fetch but a few pence, except in seasons of scarcity, when they have been known to sell for a franc and more each.

The most expeditious and wholesale method there employed consists in the following curious plan, which is regularly carried out every winter when the weather suits, *i.e.* when it freezes, the harder the better. These men select a meadow near some never-freezing spring, and then they overflow it, covering its surface merely with an inch or two of running water. The birds, driven by hunger and at their wits'-ends to get food, resort in perfect tribes to these artificial swamps, where they know food and water can be obtained. Meanwhile the bird-catchers prepare their long lines, profusely adorned with horse-hair loops, and these they proceed to set over the swamp, securing the line at each bend with a small forked stick stuck in the ground, and bringing the lines round and across in every conceivable direction, so that when once a bird has landed anywhere within its circumference, it cannot step half a yard in any direction without unconsciously getting its head, or legs, or wings, in one or two of the snares.

I have seen this practised myself, and have been an eye-witness to the capture of ten dozen of birds within an hour. In fact, the birds that have escaped are so hungry that they hardly give time to the loopers to rearrange the loops after a catch, before they come down again and are caught. No call of any kind is strictly necessary, except when there is an extensive covert close by, when one or two tame starlings soon draw crowds to the spot. The loopers have generally a small straw hut close to the swamped meadow, generally within a foot or two of the water, and they are at work from sunrise till sunset. One hundred dozens of birds are no unusual catch *per diem*, but as a rule, the more abundant the birds the worse is their condition. I have seen some that were perfect skeletons. The men generally keep a gun or two in the hut, for should the weather be very severe

and somewhat boisterous, it not uncommonly happens that early in the morning, or when evening sets in, a belated duck or two, or a few curlews or snipe and even woodcocks, have been known to come down, and then, as the loops are not strong enough to secure them, the guns are brought to bear on these birds instanter. But such occasions are rare, except as regards woodcocks or partridges, which sometimes come there to drink, when of course they get "potted."

There are also, occasionally, immense flocks of starlings and thrushes which suddenly make their appearance, whence, no one knows; but as soon as their presence is announced the *gardes-forestiers* make their preparations, and the low coverts where the birds have pitched for the night are carefully watched until the birds are fairly settled, and it is too dark for them to remove to other quarters. Then the men take large lanterns, some baskets and light wands, and repair to the covert, where the birds are keeping up an incessant chatter. The lanterns are lighted, the sticks got ready, the baskets are opened by the boys in charge of them, whose duty it is to pick up the birds when they are knocked down, and the "sport" begins.

I once went with Hans and his boys to see how the affair was carried on, and I must say it is wonderfully simple. Hans, holding his lantern in one hand, looked up for the birds, and cleverly knocked them down with his stick, and no sooner were they down than they were pounced upon by his greedy *petits garçons*, who almost yelled with delight. In spite of the noise and the glare the birds would not fly away. Those which moved at all merely jumped up or down on to another branch when aimed at and missed, when the second blow would strike them off their perch down to mother earth. The starlings kept up all the time a most extraordinary chatter. The trees and short covert were black with them. I never elsewhere saw such a multitude of birds, and the noise was so great that it was almost necessary to shout to be heard. It was pitch dark, a *sine quâ non* to the success of the undertaking it seems, for when the sky cleared up a bit and the moon finally appeared, the birds seemed to awaken to some sense of their danger and removed to the highest branches; some, indeed, departed to the next covert. The boys picked up a couple of hundred birds within an hour, and I daresay they lost a score or so besides. In fact, Hans did nothing but tick! tock! tack! with his stick to his left, to his right, in front of him, and above his head, as fast as he could aim and strike. I had never seen such an expedient before, and rather enjoyed the novelty of the affair, to tell the candid truth. Hans netted that night about

seventy-five francs, or three pounds sterling, by his expedition, so no wonder he was anxious to get my leave to practise it.

As regards sparrows, they are taken by hand on dark nights in the low hedges when the wind blows hard and the weather is cold. But this Hans' boys did by themselves, and I saw them once with a bunch of sixty or seventy birds as the product of an hour or so's hunting in a single long hedge.

CHAPTER XXII.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

In the mountainous districts of Alsace (at least whilst I was there), there were some *chasseurs de profession*, whose shooting licences were always a thorn in the side of the rural police. These *chasseurs* used to consider as praiseworthy any act or attempt tending to evade the law and its provisions, and I need not say that the *permisse de chasse* law was, and had always been, highly obnoxious to their minds. Therefore, the most cunning tricks were resorted to by them in order to evade obedience to it, and strange to say, the well-to-do portion of the peasant community did not see any harm in that. In fact, contraband and illicit shooting were looked upon not unfavourably, but netting or wiring were considered all that was bad.

Professional mountain shooters as a rule go in couples, only shoot at large game, and during the night. There are in the mountains some streams and pools peculiarly attractive to the *chevreuils*, and to these streams or pools the *chasseurs* accordingly repair when the coast is clear, *i.e.* when there are no *gendarmes* about the village watching for them : for, as regards the shooting localities themselves, these are secluded enough, goodness knows, and no *gendarme* in his senses would attempt to reach such, even if he knew where they are situated, and could pick out his way there unperceived.

The men shoot in couples for two reasons ; firstly, one is enabled to watch the passes whilst the other one is *à l'affût*, *i.e.* awaiting game at their favourite places of resort ; secondly, although a man may very well carry home a roebuck on his back, he would find the job a tolerably tough one if he had two or a wild-boar to take away. Besides, in such wild out-of-the-way places it is well to have a companion near at hand, in case of accidents,

especially in winter-time, when snow covers the passes and makes mountain travelling anything but a matter of pleasure.

Now, for the sake of peace with the authorities, all the professional shooters of a village used to agree to contribute towards the purchase of one single licence. This licence was drawn up in the name of the one amongst them in whom they could place the most confidence, and to this man they accordingly used to flock with their spoils, and he disposed of them to the best of his abilities, and afterwards took a share out of the proceeds. The result of this peculiar arrangement was that legally no *garde* or *gendarme* could say anything to the traffic that was going on, for was not the man entitled to shoot by his licence, and therefore could he not sell his game? Decidedly he could, and no police, rural or otherwise, could interfere then. They could have done so if they had succeeded in intercepting the bringing in of game by the real shooters, but that would have been difficult, because the licensed fellow could go and meet his comrades on the heights, and bring into his house with their help what he was virtually supposed to have shot.

Hence the ludicrous mistakes into which strangers are led occasionally by those peculiar arrangements.

There was a professional living some thirty miles from our place whose reputation was simply tremendous, for it did not matter when buyers applied to him, he had always plenty of large game to sell. I thought he was bound to be one of these shooters of whom we read so much (particularly in adventures in far-away lands), who never miss a shot, but invariably place their bullets just where they ought to be. The man himself boasted of his skill as much as the villagers praised it; but we found out his little game quite accidentally. We were on a trip in his neighbourhood, and met two men coming down from the mountain with a fine old buck, shot through the head in a peculiar manner, the bullet having gone clean through. Well, in the evening we saw that same buck in the old man's cottage, and he said *he* had shot it. Thereupon I related to him what I knew about it, and he acknowledged then that he was but a *receveur de gibier*, and that nine out of every ten heads of game that entered his place had been shot by his younger and more daring *confrères*.

The system is not confined to Alsace, and whenever I hear of a professional shooter whose house is always full of game, I am rather shy of believing that he shoots it all himself, and those who are "in the swim" know that I am right there.

I went half-a-dozen times *à l'affût* by night, and I cannot say that it is very entertaining, although the *chasseurs* praise it much,

and consider it the acme of skill and endurance to wait long enough for a shot, and then succeed in bagging.

As regards patience, it certainly requires a deal of it; but that is all. Properly speaking, there is no sport. Nerves are the thing. If you happen to get too excited at the sight of game—in other words, if you get the buck fever—then farewell to your shooting.

It is an astonishing thing this feverish excitement. The whole of one's frame seems to be *détraqué*; and really it appears as though your gun weighs a ton, more or less, but rather more. Its immediate cause I take to be a peculiar unstringing of the nerves, which renders one powerless to act. It is somewhat akin to that rising in the throat and weakness in the joints, which a young shooter is apt to experience when he first sees dogs on point, and walks up to them.

Now, strange to say, a professional shooter, a man whose shooting is to him bread-and-butter, experiences that nervousness more than anyone else. That is because he is so anxious not to miss, that it is positive misery to him to wait long, and yet he must wait for fear of missing. And that is why independent sporting gentlemen and gamekeepers are almost invariably free from nervousness, and therefore clever shots (I mean those with good practice, of course), because they remain under any circumstances cool and collected, as they do not care or mind much whether they bag or not.

I have noticed that all large game shot by unlicensed men was always what is called in shooting parlance "murdered," *i.e.* shot at so close as to make missing a matter of downright impossibility, and any wound thus inflicted at close range was of such a serious nature as to entail almost immediate death.

It is, however, in Alsace, only in the mountains that one hears of these free-shooters, simply because the mountains themselves are never preserved. They are so impracticable that virtually they have no owners, at least as regards sporting, except in very rare cases indeed, such as when the mountain is a well-known refuge for game, so that its owner derives an income from its sporting capabilities.

In the majority of cases, however, they are free, *i.e.* there are no gamekeepers to warn off intruders, and anyone who holds a shooting licence is entitled to sport thereon. But, who is to sport there? Not the well-to-do portion of the village community, certainly. These are gentlemen of some little fortune, who prize their lives in direct ratio to their incomes, and who, therefore, would not be so foolish as to endanger their safety by undertaking some rash excursions into the passes and defiles. These are

content to shoot over setters or dachshunds, either in the fields or in the woods, where, if they can meet with large game, well and good. This, however, is of rare occurrence as compared to the certainty of finding game *à l'affût* on the heights, if one has a knowledge of the favoured spots, and sufficient patience to wait there until game turns up.

The consequence of all this is, that most large game is shot there by the needy unlicensed shooters, and brought to a licensed shooter belonging to the confederation.

There was another such great licensed *chasseur* in another hamlet, whose capabilities were also tremendous, according to public renown. In order to find out whether he was or not a *bonâ-fide* excellent shooter, or whether his supplies were provided by others, we tried to induce him to take us for an excursion or two, but he alleged that the season did not suit, that the tracks were impassable, and so forth, yet he always had roebucks, boars, foxes, &c., hanging up from a beam! We commissioned Fritz to keep him company and make him drink, and then Fritz found it all out by pretending he was tipsy and falling asleep in the man's house. In the dead of night came a knock at a little window over the man's bed, and after looking at Fritz to ascertain if he was really in the land of dreams, he opened his door to two *braconniers*, who walked in, each carrying a buck on his shoulders.

These excursions *à l'affût* have one very great charm to a stranger, and that is their novelty; but it is sometimes rather hard to induce a *braconnier* to lead one to a good place. Still, for a consideration, some of them will do it. For five francs and drink most of them will do wonders. The first night I went, it was moonlight when we reached our ground, and the snow had covered the mountain for more than a week. The effect of this universal dazzling whiteness was to show to us from ever so far any object approaching our ambush. The latter had been very roughly and quickly extemporised out of a mound of faggots that stood at the border of the wood. Two of these placed flat on the ground constituted our seats. Four or five on either side hid us effectually, but above there was nothing, and it was certainly rather cold and uncomfortable to wait thus in this wilderness of snow. The favoured spring ran before us within forty yards of our ambuscade.

We waited an hour—two hours—three hours—four hours, and nothing came. Half-a-dozen wolves were howling under covert about a mile from us, over some carcase I presume, and two foxes passed at a hundred yards from us, giving tongue on some quarry. By-the-way, have you ever heard a fox's peculiar yap!

yap! in the dead of night? Have you ever heard the howls of wolves kept at bay by the strongest among them over the dead body of the quarry they have run down?

No! Well, you ought then, for it is highly diverting. Of course you have nothing to fear, for your gun is ready at hand; but still it brings queer ideas into your head, to hear the infernal concert starting suddenly around you in the deep stillness of a night in the mountains.

Well, at about 1 A.M., owing probably to the aforesaid row, no buck had appeared, and we had to make up our minds to go away. We got out, drank a glass of wine, my guide and I, then we lighted our pipes, slung our rifles over our shoulders, and made a start.

Going down the valley we heard a fox yelping, and stopped, taking our guns in hand, and hiding behind a rock. Up came the voice nearer and nearer. Then, suddenly we heard the well-known squeak! squeak! of a hare, and my guide started at full speed down the path, shouting to me:

"They have got it, sir, they have got it!"

I ran after him, and about a hundred yards below we found, sure enough, the hare dead, but the foxes had bolted, and my guide showed me the place where the second fox had hid himself, and where he had nabbed pussy. I knew foxes acted thus in concert together, but I had never been a witness to the deed, and felt much interest at the whole trick.

We did not fire a single shot that night, and my guide attributed it to the presence in our neighbourhood of so many *carnivora*.

The next night we went again, and that time a buck came to the spring. He looked in the gloom three times as big as he really was, but the moon being under a cloud I had not a nice view of him. However, in accordance with the pantomime wishes of my companion, who was anxious that we should bag, I aimed as best I could, and fired.

"He's gone!" exclaimed the man, with utter woe in his tone; "you missed him!"

And he was inconsolable.

"Never mind," I said, "I will indemnify you for it, for I am just as pleased with having seen the *chevreuil* as if I had bagged it, and you shall not be a loser by my want of skill." (I had told the man, when we made our arrangements, that whatever I should succeed in bringing down would be his, as I did not want the game, but merely wanted the fun of shooting it.)

This brightened him up a bit, but still it was with a gloomy mien that he led the way on our return to the village.

"Such a beauty!" he was saying to himself. "What a pity!"

And of course my conscience smote me.

"What an awful muff I must have been to miss such an easy shot," I was thinking to myself, when, lo! an exclamation of surprise from my companion makes me look up. The fellow actually dances for joy, and springs up in the air, gun in hand, in the style of a wild Indian. Then he comes up to me, and, after the manner of these rough Alsatian mountaineers, seizes my hand in his and grasps it tightly.

"Meinherr!" exclaims he, "*je vous demande pardon! Le chevreuil est tué et bien tué!* And there he is!"

And sure enough, at the bend of the path lay the roebuck, stark dead, right across the gully. I felt as though a weight were lifted off my breast. Confound it, I knew I had fired right well! We looked up the buck; he was shot right in the breast, and was a very fine fellow.

"Would you mind carrying my gun?" asked the man.

"Certainly not."

"Very well then, here it is, and here goes." He took the buck's hind-legs in one hand, the fore-legs in the other, and swinging it clear on to his shoulders, we made our way thus to the village.

Just before finding our dead quarry, the man was walking as if going to his own funeral, but now, with the buck on his back, he stepped away like a professional pedestrian. I asked him the whys and wherefores of his hurry.

"I wish us to be back before the inn shuts up," said he.

"Why? are you thirsty?"

"Thirsty!" he exclaimed, laughing, "I am always thirsty, but that is not it. I want to show the fellows there what we can do. They humbugged me yesterday for coming home empty-handed: we will see now who will laugh best!"

Well, at last we got to the inn, and my guide made anything but a modest *entrée*. Lifting up the latch, and kicking the door open:

"Ah! ah! Hans! Kasper! Karl! here you are! Just go and try to shoot a fellow the weight of this one!" shouted he, and he flung the roebuck on a table.

Of course, he caused quite a commotion in the room. All the dogs in the place got up in a hurry to have a look and a lick at the buck, and all the *buveurs* came to examine the *chevreuil*. My guide forthwith told them a terrible lot of lies. According to his account, the buck was at least at good cannon range, and actually flying when I shot it. But then these men will always exaggerate. The sober truth was, the buck, when I fired at it,

was not more than fifty yards from me, and it was standing still, looking my way—perhaps looking at me.

I went to four more *affûts*, but only shot one more buck.

On my own shooting, or on my friend's, we rarely indulged in that sort of thing when there was a chance of finding the quarry on the morrow; but when wild-boars visited us and we got wind of their whereabouts, we always tried to bag them without having recourse to any other dogs but the two boarhounds, for the reason that dachshunds never hesitate a moment, and if brought to hunt a boar and the said boar stops to face them, they all go at him and come off second best. They cannot make much mark on a boar's tough hide, whereas each upward "go" of his ugly snout brings his tusks into prominent contact with the dogs' ribs, much to the latter's danger, and dachshunds cannot be taught caution. We therefore rarely hunted wild-boars with the little dogs, and when we did, we posted ourselves round the covert so as to clip the brute at the very first opportunity; and if by chance he was missed, the boarhounds were instantly let go to protect the pack and distract the infuriated boar's attention, until another shot could be sent to settle him.

By-the-way, had I not seen it, I could not have believed that such an apparently unwieldy animal as a boar could cover ground so fast as it does. It is simply marvellous. It does not seem at any time to exert itself much, yet goes very well indeed, and I have seen packs of hounds in good condition barely keeping up with it, and unable to gain unless it chose to stop and face them, its usual dodge when out of breath. But a thoroughly beaten boar is a sight never to be forgotten. The dogs hang on to him in every conceivable way, from his hind legs, on his back, from his ears, and he is so dead tired and knocked up that he cannot even shake them off, and drags them passively with him under the covert of a thick bush if he can manage to do so. If, however, he succeeds in so doing and can recover his breath, look out for squalls! The next man, dog, or horse that will stand in his way in his charge will have good cause to remember it.

I once saw a beaten boar entirely giving itself up in a furze-field. I was riding to the town, and hearing common dogs furiously barking and men shouting, I rode across the fields until I came to the top of the hill, when I saw a lot of peasants with their dogs surrounding a half-grown boar, which stood at bay in the short furze. I went to see how it would end, and they told me they had chased him all day long round about, and he was fairly beaten. It turned out, however, that though he was dead beat for the time being, he was far from being bagged, for the

dogs present either did not dare to face him or else really could not kill him, and no one amongst the men had a gun or even a knife. Well, some young fellow actually tripped the boar, and rigged his belt round its hind-legs to prevent its bolting until a gun could be procured, and there lay the brute, heaving its sides and foaming at the mouth, and taking no notice of either the men or the dogs, though the latter made frequent attacks upon its hind legs and back. After five minutes thus spent the boar got up under the smarting bite of a cur, the strap slipped off, and he charged clean through our ranks and disappeared in covert with the scratch pack at his heels! but he had singled out the dog that had most worried him, and had ripped its belly open before going. Subsequently, but after another long chase, the men succeeded in coming up with their boar, and one amongst them who had got a gun shot it.

Generally speaking, for the man who delights to ramble with his shot-gun there is plenty of sport to be had in the Alsatian woods. Most of the natives, in their wish to bag large game, do not fire at birds until the coverts have been thoroughly beaten through and through. Now, when this beating is done everyone is generally tired, and no more is done, so that the birds remain practically safe. Hence good bags are to be made there at all times, but unless you have a shooting of your own, or the owner who gives you leave to sport in his covert does not care himself for shooting, or else he wishes to propitiate and please you for some motive or other, it is difficult to procure leave to sport in coverts, lest you should frighten large game. Of course it is a matter of taste, but I think there is far more genuine, sterling sport in bagging five couple of woodcocks or half-a-dozen wild pheasants which you have sought for and sprung in their wilderness, than waiting at a covert-side for hours in order to get a shot at a roebuck, or even a stag or a wild-boar. At the same time you will never make a peasant believe that it is not a far more sporting achievement to kill a boar which weighs over a hundred pounds, than bagging fifty birds in regular sporting style. When no large game is known to be about, leave is generally readily granted. Still, it is better to pay for the right and do as I did.

Anywhere in Alsace one month's shooting will pay for the whole year's rent, so that you have all the other months free, so to speak.

Woodcocks appear at the end of September, and remain until the frost sets in severely. Some coverts (amongst which I must class those I had) are so thick that shooting in them is a matter of thought and reflection. I had an old gun, whose left barrel,

through much firing, had got so thin as to actually wear out at the muzzle. I got that gun's barrels shortened by nine inches, and a better one to shoot with under thick covert I have never had. Before I resorted to that dodge, I always had experienced great difficulty in bringing an ordinary gun to shoulder sufficiently quick to grass my birds in style before they were out of aim, on account of the barrels being always hooked or banged against branches, twigs, or other impediments; but with my short gun matters took a different turn, and no sooner was the bird up than it was brought down.

The beauty of these coverts in Alsace is that you are quite alone, and you can enjoy the fun thoroughly and heartily, without rigidly sticking to your dignity, as is the case when you have an attendant accompanying you in your rambles. The latter seems now to be a *sine qua non* in the British kingdom, for when any sportsman goes out alone and carries his own game, he is put down there and then as nobody by the snobs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIRING A SHOOTING IN ALSACE—*continued.*

One of the most striking results brought about by the quiet, orthodox way in which the Alsatians used to shoot, was the remarkable knowledge evinced by almost every Alsatian sportsman of the habits of game. Of course, when a man shoots alone year after year right through every shooting season, he must perforce make a note, mentally, of those incidents which to him are of almost every-day occurrence. Hence the business-like ways displayed by such shooters in the field.

In England, shooters are nowadays always in "such a hurry" that nobody, perhaps, in a company of ten sportsmen would be enabled to tell at a glance, for instance, the sex of a hare in its form. I admit that with us it does not much matter whether we possess that power of discrimination or not, for, whatever be the hare's gender, they are all to be killed if their death can be fairly effected. But not so with the game preservers in Alsace, especially towards the end of the season, when they make it a rule, as far as they can possibly manage, to shoot only the bucks. Their motive for so doing is this: many of the does towards the *clôture de la chasse* are "interesting," therefore shooting them would be destroying all prospect of good sport for the ensuing season. Then there are always enough bucks left about and to spare: indeed, their great number leads to no end of battles, and it is no uncommon thing for them to destroy each other, and to bother the does so much as to drive them distracted, and induce them to destroy their young.

Hence the war waged by the shooters against the male part of the hare family, and the great protection they extend to the females.

I have seen several of the latter near farmhouses which have been so effectually protected as to grow quite old and tame.

Of course, when a hare is actually running in the fields it is shot; but if a hare be discovered in its form the shooters leave it alone, if they can make out that it is a doe. This, I was told, they judge by the way in which it holds its ears. If the ears are held parallel and over the back, the hare is a buck. If they are held wide apart and touch the sides of the shoulders, the hare is a doe. Now this is a queer piece of woodcraft, certainly; and in Alsace, where hares are so abundant, the shooters have such practice that they rarely fail in their judgment of the sex. As may well be imagined, it is only those men who preserve game and hold shootings, who attend to such niceties. In those parts of the country where the shootings are free to all comers, you would not see such a display of forbearance.

It is a fact that, from whatever cause, there were few places (even in England, and then only where hares are preserved for coursing) that could boast of a fairer show of hares than Alsace had at the time I shot there.

As regards greyhounds, their use was, and I believe is still, forbidden there, but the law was evaded to some extent by the use of half-bred lurchers, which coursed with more or less success. The dogs which did the greatest amount of mischief in the poaching line belonged to those gangs of tinkers and soothsayers who regularly attended all fairs and markets in the country. There was hardly a single caravan without a lurcher or two chained to the axle of one of the vans. At night or very early in the morning the men took the dogs for a stroll; or if, when driving slowly along the roads, they spied a hare in a neighbouring field or crossing the road, and no one was about, they would readily slip a dog or two at it, and run the chance of being caught, when of course their case would have been clear, viz. a fine for the men and, generally, death to the dog.

But it rarely happened they were caught, because their companions always managed to keep a good watch about, and in the most innocent manner.

For instance, when a whole caravan was on the march, the leading and rear vans kept a good look-out, and exhibited at once some preconcerted signal, if *gendarmes* or *gardes* appeared on the road or in the fields. Meanwhile, so long as the coast was clear, the men belonging to the middle vans were busy looking for hares and beating the hedges, and their lurchers, which were in their way models of training, cunning, and obedience, kept them faithful company. Moreover, none but fawn dogs did they keep, so that they should not be too conspicuous.

I have several times seen with my glass, from a long way off,

the whole trick performed with deftness and precision, and once I saw such a performance escaping detection and punishment by a mere "shave."

This is how it happened: I was on a hill, resting from an arduous beat in a small covert, and lying down at full length on the grass, conversing with Hans, when he directed my attention to a long file of carts and vans coming out of a forest road about three miles away, and a good distance from our ground. The road, as it left the forest, wound about between stubbles and meadows, where of course coursing was practicable, and thereupon Hans, pulling out my glass from the bag, handed it to me, saying:

"If you watch them, meinherr, you will see their *lévriers* soon running, for the ground on both sides of the road is good for hares."

Well, I "fixed" the glass to a proper sight and looked.

"Hans," said I, "they are going along peacefully enough; there are two carts leading the way: then there is about a hundred yards, interval between these, and a four-wheeled van, and at some distance behind come the rest."

"Well, sir," said Hans, "watch that single van in the middle."

I did so, and presently, as it was going merely at a slow walking pace, a man came out at the back and stood on the flight of steps that led to its entrance. He looked ahead and back at the other carts, then jumped on the road, and I saw him holding up his hand, when another fellow came out and three or four dogs followed him. There were no hedges. The only boundary to the fields consisted of a side ditch about half a yard wide. The men separated and walked one on each side of the road, and at a signal one of the dogs started at full speed across the fields. This dog was not a lurcher, and by his style of quartering I judged him to be a setter, a spaniel, or a shepherd's dog. He found nothing in the first field, but no sooner had he landed in the next than I saw the three lurchers darting towards him. I looked before the first dog and saw the hare. Of course, against such odds the hare had no chance. She was pressed alternately by one and then by another of the dogs, and within half a minute she was caught.

The dogs instantly bolted (the one that had killed carrying the hare) towards the van, wherein I conjectured the men had gone, for they were nowhere to be seen. The conveyance stopped, all the dogs got in, and then onwards started the old horse again.

"They have caught a hare," I said to Hans, "but now they are all inside the van."

"That is to see whether anyone is watching them," replied he, "in which case they would say that the dogs had escaped them,

and they were now shutting them up to prevent any further mischief. But they will soon be out again."

Sure enough the men did come out soon after, but for a couple of hundred yards they kept smoking their pipes very peaceably. Then one went in again and out came the dogs. The ranging dog was sent on as before, but on the other side of the road this time. All at once I saw him running towards the road as fast as he could tear. I looked, but there was no hare, and the men and the lurchers had disappeared in the carriage once more, and straightway the ranging dog joined them. I explained what was taking place to Hans.

"Their confederates have signalled that somebody was coming," he said.

And true enough, two *gendarmes* on horseback were actually descending the hill towards the carts. When they got to them they stopped the lot.

"That is to inspect their travelling papers," said Hans; "they have not caught them and never will; it is almost impossible with those gipsies' system of watching, as you saw yourself just now."

"But suppose we should give information," I remarked, "our joint testimony would be sufficient, and besides, proofs would not be wanting, for the hare they have caught must be still warm."

"Bah!" said Hans, "the hare has been skinned, cut to pieces, and put in the pot by this time, sir; those fellows know well the risks they run; and besides it would bring ourselves into some danger if we denounced them; their friends and confederates would be sure to plot some devilry against us, and as they are not on our ground we have legally no right to interfere."

"What do you mean by 'they might plot some devilry against us'?"

"Oh," he replied with evident earnestness, "these fellows stand at nothing to have revenge. They have always managed it, heretofore, and would do so again no doubt. Why, in the dead of night they set fire to the harvest, to outbuildings, to forests. Then they bolt, and no traces are to be found of the perpetrators of the deeds.

There was some truth in these assertions, as I heard afterwards, and the rural population looked upon all those travelling bands with fear and distrust; but I daresay a good deal is put to their credit which they are not answerable for.

At the time I am speaking of the country was literally swarming with these people, and it was very rare indeed that a troop travelled about without some of its members owning a fighting bear or two, although bear-baiting was legally forbidden, and if caught in the

act the bears were liable to be seized and their owners fined. But the inducements were too strong to resist, and as there were always in the villages men who owned fighting dogs, and were ready to pit them against any living thing, the consequence was that there were always a few secret sets-to, at which only those who could be trusted were present.

Low-class travelling menageries made the best part of their incomes in that way. When the owner of such a menagerie, by some chance, possessed a devil of a bear, a cunning hyena, or a powerful old wolf, he could always win some money in bets on his animals if they could victoriously tackle the dogs.

On the other hand, it needed good fighters to hold out long against some of the dare-devil dogs of the foresters. When a powerful and ferocious dog, well versed in the art of attack and defence, through almost daily practice with the *carnivore* of the forests, was slipped at a bear or any other fighter, the contest was generally a close affair, not always without danger even to the bystanders, for when once a large dog of that stamp gets "his dander up," he does not much mind what he pitches upon ; and it not uncommonly happened that when the separation of the fighters was attempted (as was the rule as soon as either of the owners declared his dog or his bear beaten) there was a pretty to-do to secure the dog or dogs.

According to my views, such contests are not fair, and I am glad to say they are getting out of fashion altogether.

Mind, I would encourage a fight as well as any man when the dogs, in the course of regular hunting, are brought face to face with a powerful, ferocious, wild, and free animal, because the chances are there equal, and the dog that backs out of the contest ought to be shot. But the idea of keeping prisoner a poor animal and offering him as a butt for all the fighting dogs of a village is, to me, revolting.

However, the men themselves do not consider things in that light. The bear-keepers look on theirs as a regular *bonâ-fide* business, with its profits and dangers, and they run the risk of winning the stakes or getting their animals disabled with the business-like ways of regular traders, who calculate their losses and their gains according to the fluctuations of their market. Of course the dogs' owners are virtually as much to blame as the bear-keepers in such matters ; but in the case of the former it is not so much a matter of speculation as an uncontrollable pride in their dogs and confidence in their pluck, that induces them to accept the challenges.

For instance, certainly it was not money that induced my friend

to enter his two boarhounds, but circumstances and "chaff" led him irresistibly into it.

It was towards the end of my stay in the province that it took place. There was a fair going on at the village, and of course it was thronged with farmers, peasants, gentlemen, foresters, showmen, women, and children. There were the usual booths of all sorts. There was wrestling for prizes and pole-climbing, and the *cabarets* were all full.

Well, at one of these some bear-men, who for years had attended that fair, had established their quarters, and to that place the men fond of baiting flocked, to see what animals they had brought with them. Fritz was a prominent visitor there, as he had frequently fought his master's dogs in seasons past, and they had generally come out pretty fairly in the encounters. This time, however, he had received an intimation from my friend that there should be no more fighting for the dogs, and so the matter had ended; but worthy Fritz met some friends of his at the fair, and they had been to the inn, and told him wonders, so he must needs go too, to have a look. What took place there we never knew exactly; but evidently Master Fritz had laid a plot of his own, for he came to us as we were watching two fellows wrestling on the grass in front of a booth, and taking off his cap, intimated thereby that he had something to say.

"What is the matter, Fritz?" asked my friend.

"Nothing of importance, sir; but I have just seen the bear-men and their bears, and you would like to see them too, sir, I am sure. One is a splendid fellow!"

"Indeed."

"Yes, and he is said to be a wonder. He has only been caught a fortnight, and oh! he is wild, that is all! When we went to have a look at him just now he made a dart at us, such a pull! It was a wonder his chain did not snap! He is the finest bear I have seen these twenty years."

"Let us go and have a look," said my friend.

And we went. Whilst on our way I remarked that I thought fighting bears were forbidden.

"So they are, but the men don't fight them in public," said my companion; "they have, ostensibly, a public show, where they charge a penny for the people to look at some animals, but the fighting takes place secretly at an out-of-the-way place."

Just then we reached the inn and went in. It was crowded, so much so that it appeared at first a matter of some difficulty, not only to enter it, but even to hear oneself speak; but at my friend's appearance there was a comparative silence, and he was

the observed of all the throng, being well known in the place, and a lane was formed for us to go through. According to custom, we did not go straight for the bears, but sat at a table where two other persons were sitting with whom we were acquainted, and had some wine. At a table close to the counter sat three stout powerful fellows, with swarthy complexions, and bearded up to their eyes and ears. They were stoutly clothed and looked very substantial in their way. They were drinking with and talking to a knot of foresters, and their glasses clinked repeatedly in token of goodwill and friendship. These three men were the bear keepers. No sooner did they perceive my friend than they came towards us, and bowing and taking off their caps in true continental fashion, the greeting took place, and after some remarks on the weather, the crops, &c., during which the utmost silence reigned in the rest of the room, all those present watching narrowly the proceedings, there came my friend's inquiry about the bears, and a general move was made to look at them.

Across the yard we went, and stopped at a side stable whilst one of the men opened the paddock.

Two bears were there, quiet enough, poor fellows; and as they were roused by their keepers, and stood up on their hind-legs, I could see the poor brutes were old hands at the game, for their ears were torn through and through, and their coats bore marks of severe fights, both of old and recent date. I remarked aloud that they bore scars which showed that although they could well protect their lives, the dogs occasionally made pretty good use of their teeth on them, judging by their ears and scarred bodies. To this the keepers shrugged their shoulders and smiled.

"Well," said one of them, "if these two bears appear to you so battered that you would not have the heart to witness an onslaught on them, what think you of this brand-new one?"

And he led us to another outhouse where, all by himself, and strongly chained to the wall, stood a monstrous bear, grinding his teeth and looking at us wickedly.

"Now, sir," the spokesman said to my friend, "this bear, only a fortnight ago, was roaming at will; he has never yet fought, he is fresh, and a good one, and I am ready to back him, up to a thousand francs, against any two dogs that can be brought against him."

This, of course, was a pointed allusion to Wolf and Bull, who had the year before licked the man's bears, one after the other, handsomely.

I saw the drift of the offer at once, and so did my friend, who replied that he did not intend to fight his dogs any more. There-

upon the men looked at one another with scorn ; he saw them grinning, and I knew at once what would happen, so that I was not surprised when, in reply to a triumphant remark from the men that no dogs in existence would dare to face that new bear of theirs, my friend retorted that he had just made up his mind to let his have "a try," at any rate.

In two minutes the arrangements were explained and agreed to. The fight was to take place that same afternoon at a small farmhouse, where a back-yard had been used for years for that purpose.

Great was the excitement in the place the moment the decision was known, and, as is usual in such matters, now that the ice was broken, this match led to others, and eventually about a score of dogs were engaged to fight this and the other bears during the day.

The whole affair was carried on very quietly. The bears were taken to the spot in a covered cart. By what means their keepers managed them, I know not, especially the new bear, which I should think would have proved a "hard nut to crack" to most men.

At 2 o'clock about fifty men and twenty dogs were on the spot. I was not there, having resolutely declined to attend any such sport (?), but, judging from the result, it was a bad speculation for all parties concerned, at least as regarded my friend's dogs and the new bear. Wolf broke the bear's jaw, and got his belly ripped open in return, in spite of which he held on like grim death ; whilst Bull throttled the bear, after having torn its nose and ears, and, as a remembrance of the deed, the bear crushed him out of shape, and nearly out of breath, in a terrific hug.

The match was declared "a draw ;" the bear was locked up half-dead in a stable, there to recover if he could ; and the two dogs were brought home in a pitiable state, and had to be attended to at once by a veterinary surgeon.

What folly all this was !

I have given all particulars just to show how it comes that such fights are agreed upon. The bear-men cast doubts on the dogs' courage ; the dogs' owners thereupon become angry ; and as there is no other way to prove that the dogs will tackle the bear but by bringing both dogs and bears together, why, the matches are made, with more or less disastrous results.

To the majority of people such affairs used to prove so attractive as to be perfectly irresistible, judging by the eagerness with which they were attended even by outsiders ; whilst their

popularity has always been great with men whose avocations entail the use of powerful dogs.

Just before the laws were strictly enforced, such exhibitions were perfectly public, and much patronised. Jules Janin, in his celebrated book, *L'Ane Mort et la Femme Guillotinée*, narrates the fights which used to take place at the Barrière du Combat in Paris; and Messrs. Erckmann-Chatrian, in their publication, The *Combat d'Ours*, also tell of two or three bear-fights against dogs, and both authors state that the crowds were so great as to cram the buildings.

The *Combat d'Ours*, if I remember right, took place either in Alsace or in Lorraine; but of course the narrators have invested them with an amount of providential romance which is quite necessary, it seems, in novel-writing. Thus, Messrs. Erckmann-Chatrian describe how a ferocious bear broke loose in the midst of the baiting, and when some dreadful accident was bound to happen, a bull, which was not at all intended to fight, was let loose, or got loose somehow, from its stable, and killed the bear.

Well, the bear-fight has taken me away from shooting subjects proper, but of these I had not much more to say. The shooting season passed away very quickly, and in the summer I left Alsace, having thoroughly enjoyed myself, and delighted with the sport I had met there.

I cannot speak of it as it is now, for I have not been there since the events I have related; but if the province is now as good for sport as it was then, all I can say is:

"Would to goodness I had again a shooting in Alsace!"

SHOOTING IN BELGIUM.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FIELD SHOOTING.

Our sport, on my first shooting expedition in Belgium, was in the fullest meaning of the expression a mixture. Mixture of dogs, of men, of guns, and of game. We had a pointer bitch, blind of one eye, wild and uncertain in her range, but for a wonder, stanch and true on point, and (tell it not to our formally stiff sportsman) we had also a greyhound running loose together with the pointer. Our guns differed also materially; and even ourselves, the shooters, differed considerably both in appearance and style, and I may safely say also in opinions; finally, our sport itself was of a mixed character, our game comprising hares, partridges, snipe, ducks, teals, widgeons, curlews, plovers, &c. &c. I thought, as we started, that could we have been seen by any sportsman thoroughly imbued with our British ideas on sport, no doubt he would have predicted a complete failure in the way of our making a bag, but in this, *ne lui en déplaise*, he would have been mistaken, for notwithstanding the incongruity of working together a pointer and a greyhound, we succeeded in filling our bags in a remarkably short time. I confess that I had some decided misgivings when I first saw what our canine allies were to be; but being assured that we should have some fun, I went, and I candidly confess that I have had no cause to regret it. I enjoyed myself immensely.

We started at 5 A.M. According to agreement my companions picked me up, my actual abode being on the road to the scene of action, and we began a lumbering journey over the paved roads. The rattling of the cab was, to say the least, "a caution," but as

the day soon turned fine and warm, we opened the windows, and the din was then and there to a certain extent put a stop to. The morning mists were steaming up from the meadows, and the sun was already rising in a cloudless sky, foreboding a hot day, as it indeed turned out. The country being almost perfectly flat there is something very peculiar in the appearance of the roads there. As they are perfectly straight and invariably bordered with tall trees, whenever you look out of window you seem to have remained stationary, as the apparently interminable rows of poplars appear for ever and ever in front of the vehicle. This ought to have a depressing influence on the cattle, and I daresay it has, for our live motive-power looked as desponding as ever a horse can look without actually contemplating suicide; and, in truth, there was enough to make the poor beast sigh and groan. However, under the urgent and irresistible arguments of our driver, the animal maintained a jog-trot that brought us to the end of our journey, seven miles in one hour and a half. Had we been in a hurry, we might have walked, and "licked" the quadruped as a matter of course.

We arrived then at half-past six at a village, where we began our operations by breakfasting at an inn: a very wise proceeding this, but marred somewhat by the monstrous charges exacted from us for that same by our over screwing host and hostess. I paid about two shillings for two eggs, some bread and butter, and a cup of coffee, which had evidently been made with the remains of sundry ink bottles, and was quite innocent of the Arabian berry. I don't mind being imposed upon in a moderate way, but such outrageous terms made me fume internally. I sarcastically inquired as to what might have been the cause of this sudden increase in the price of provisions; the answer was voluble, and thickly interspersed with many appeals to the Deity, but, as all this was couched in Flemish, I was fain to be content with a translation thereof. Now, as is well known, a translation invariably deadens the strength of arguments; but still I gleaned from the interpreter that "What we had had for breakfast would have been charged at the rate of sixpence each had we been workmen or such like, but being '*messieurs*,' of course we were bound to pay like lords!" This is a very hollow argument to my thinking. However, we paid, and were accordingly "esteemed." And now we took up guns and set out in earnest.

The fields were all of them more or less surrounded by wide ditches, so that a leaping-pole appeared to be a *sine qua non*. The first two or three ditches were jumped over easily enough, without any other help beyond a good run to provide the impetus,

but soon we came to a standstill in front of a 10-foot sort of a canal.

"Let us beat this pasture," said our leader; "we may find a snipe or two, and the shots will bring the boy with the pole."

We accordingly divided the beat between ourselves. I went along the east side against the wind, my companion took the west side, and our guide beat the centre. I had not walked twenty yards when, "tchiek! tchiek!" up flew a snipe, which I floored like a man. At the very same moment the guide potted a hare in her form (!), and the greyhound bolting another hare, flew over the ditch after it in hot pursuit. He caught it in the next meadow and brought it to hand very sensibly, whilst the pointer bitch was trying by every means in her power to snatch it from his mouth and bring it herself! Now fancy what our never-departing-from-fashionable-rules sportsmen would have said had they but witnessed such a sight! They would have been horrified; but, as the Belgians say, shooting is but an amusement, and why should it be restricted so as to put all fun out of question? Evidently my companions meant business. What they wanted was "making a bag," and they contended that that is why sportsmen take their guns and dogs and go in pursuit of game. Now, although the means employed were not quite orthodox in my own opinion, still I cannot help confessing that certainly they fulfilled the object which they professed to further.

Immediately after the two shots had been fired there appeared a tiny boy of about twelve years of age, carrying across his shoulders a fifteen-foot leaping-pole, and with the help of this instrument we went over the ditches easily enough after a little practice. And here again the usefulness of gun-slings became very apparent. How we could possibly have got over the ditches if our guns had not been provided with these slings I cannot imagine; and I wonder why our English guns are not more generally fitted with them. As it was, I experienced no difficulty whatever in going over with *armes et bagages*. We found the shootings literally alive with game. I saw more than 200 wild-ducks and teal in the course of the day, and we certainly flushed at least as many snipe; but the wind being strong and the birds flighty we did not succeed well in getting up within range of any number of them, and the consequence was a fairly moderate bag. Partridges were strong on the wing and wild, but the country being so flat we were enabled to watch their flight and to pursue the coveys with ease; and, all things considered, we succeeded with them very fairly. However, I missed one in a shameful manner. The pointer was "standing" at some distance from us in a stubble, and I was

hastening towards her, when a partridge rose at my very feet. Whether my impetus was too great, or whether the sun was "in my eye," or whether I did not "aim straight," I know not, but the bird went off, I believe, unscathed. Such is the fortune of war. Our guide was delighted at this *contretemps*, and could hardly hide his satisfaction at having seen me missing so handsomely with both barrels, for he prides himself on his extreme cleverness; and I firmly believe he could have danced for very joy. At any rate, just as he was triumphantly winking in a knowing manner at the boy, a teal got up from a ditch about twelve yards in front of him. Bang! from his gun. But to his consternation the teal continued her flight, evidently with the greatest composure.

"*Sacré* this and the other!" ejaculated the man; when, lo! another teal rose from the very same and identical spot. Bang! missed again!

This time the man, enraged at his unskilfulness, dashed his gun to the ground, and when he condescended to pick it up the gun-stock was broken.

We did laugh; in fact, we laughed so much that our irate guide ended his outbursts of silly anger by laughing too at his own folly.

But all the same he could not shoot any more for that day at any rate: and I consider that it served him right. This little incident gives an insight into the true character and temper of the lower class of Belgians, whose chief characteristic, among their defects, seems to be unmitigated envy, or jealousy, call it by whatever term you like.

A short time after this incident the keeper paid us a visit. He, too, was armed with a leaping pole, and he looked very comical as he came along, with the pole across his shoulders, his cap's peak over his right ear, and one hand thrust deep into his pocket. He, too, spoke Flemish; and as I do not understand the lingo his conversation did not edify me much. But I was fairly astonished when, on our return together to the inn, he began to drink beer. He certainly swallowed within an hour and a half very nearly twenty pints of the stuff they call there by the name of beer. Where he could possibly stow it away no one could tell, for he was as lean as a lath and nearly as tall as his pole; and we ought to have seen him grow stouter as the beer went in, but no perceptible change took place, and it will, I fear, for ever remain a mystery.

I have mentioned that that keeper wore his cap in a particular way, but this seemed to be the prevalent fashion in that part of the world, for among all the men we met in the village, or at the

inn, there was not one who wore his cap as a rational being ought to have worn it, and as it was intended to be worn by the makers. The peak of a cap, I should imagine, is intended to protect the eyes, and as such it ought to be placed straight over the visual organs, but of five men who at one time graced the room with their presence one had the peak over his left eye, the second over his right ear, the third over his right eye, the fourth had clapped it over his left ear, and the fifth had it behind his head! None of them seemed to be aware that there was anything peculiar in their appearance, so I suppose custom has made it seem perfectly natural to indulge individual caprice in the matter of wearing peaks.

At 4 P.M. we collected our guns, game, and traps, and prepared for our journey back. We had five hares, thirteen partridges, twenty-five snipe, three ducks, seven teal, one curlew, and about a dozen plovers. Not a bad day's sport this, I imagine.

The country is thoroughly preserved--I may say jealously preserved. *La Chasse* is a regular bugbear among the Belgians, who would sooner forgive you if you said that there was no Divine Being than if you had been caught shooting a robin over their land! This extreme jealousy leads to no end of disputes and lawsuits. There is hardly a sportsman in the country who, sooner or later, has not had more or less to answer for his deeds—or rather misdeeds. From this may be judiciously inferred that it is no easy matter to obtain leave to shoot anywhere. I managed it through a friend, who for many years has lived in that country; but to those who have a little money to spare Belgium offers a fair sporting field, for money there is omnipotent and almighty, and anybody with a not necessarily very long purse may obtain the best of sport. Game is abundant; but the peasants' language is abominable and unchristianlike. This, however, has a good point in its favour, viz. as you do not understand one single word of what is said to you, you are plausibly enough dispensed from taking the trouble of replying, and this saves your breath, does not disturb your attention, and certainly prevents quarrelling or differences of opinion from arising between yourself and your native companions.

The shooting licences in Belgium are good for a year, and they entitle you to shoot any sort of game, provided you have leave to sport over the land.

Seashore shooting, however, is free to all comers, and no licence of any kind whatever is required to carry a gun and use it there.

As I have shown, then, game-killing in a great measure is carried on in Belgium in a perfectly unsophisticated manner, and all sorts of dogs may be seen at one and the same time accompanying the shooters. This does not prevent beaters being employed either, so that one has a compound sport in which battueing and driving, as well as beating the fields, are occasionally resorted to, when, according to what turns up, either shooting or coursing takes place. Well, as far as this goes, certainly it is a rather unusual style of proceeding; but then *des goûts et des couleurs* 'tis useless to discuss, and if the Belgians like their sports rather *mêlés*, and they attain thereby their ultimate objects, why, in the name of all that is sensible, should they not practise it as they like?

But do not let me be misunderstood; there are, in Belgium, a good many shooters, as stiff in their etiquette, and as *à cheval sur les coutumes*, as our own beloved island can boast of possessing. There are some members of the nobility and gentry there, who certainly would no more think of having greyhounds with them when they go out shooting, than their most severe *confrères* on our own side of the water. But this, I repeat, is a matter of taste, and without wishing to impose my opinions, I should be glad to ask my brother-shooters to read me with an unprejudiced mind, and then to candidly pronounce on the merits of the case just as it stands, and without allowing their judgment to be perverted by preconceived notions. Now, for instance, I am as fond of the gun as any man living may be, but I do not like to use it, first, when there is either no skill needed in order to bag, and, secondly, when there is but a chance to wound, and not to kill. Now, a hare that starts at your very feet, or even ten or fifteen yards from you, is so absolutely at the mercy of an ordinary shooter, that, to my mind, it is but little short of "sporting murder" to fire at it. If, on the other hand, it bolts past forty yards, if fired at, it will most probably be but severely wounded, and yet have strength or ruses enough left to escape or to elude the dogs. Of course, hares have been killed clean at double the distance I mention. I have killed some thus several times myself, but how many more did I wound and did not get, that I have fired at (be it said to my shame) when virtually out of dead-killing range, so that the fact of a few hares having been killed at long distances being the exception can but prove the rule. Therefore since, when close at hand, a hare is too easy for a sportsman to shoot, and since, when too far away, it is but a useless cruelty to fire at it, why not leave hares altogether to the greyhound when coursing is practicable? This is exactly what some Belgians actually do, and if I give a short description

of how the thing is done, over some of the preserved manors, perhaps some of our own sportsmen may be tempted to do the same. There should be no false shame in adopting those customs of our neighbours that may suit ourselves, I should imagine, and as far as the subject under consideration is concerned, I for one can testify to its thorough practicability and enjoyableness. There is, however, one improvement I would suggest, and that is to keep the greyhounds in slips until a hare turns up, when the slipper should let them go; and not to do as the Belgians practise it, *i.e.* letting the greyhounds loose the whole day through, together with the other dogs. This I consider, first, unnecessary and practically useless; secondly, annoying to the shooters; and thirdly, injurious to the other dogs that may be then employed. It is unnecessary, because, as a decent greyhound can mostly always reach a hare in his sight, it is useless to let the dogs loose under the plea that being ahead they will the sooner collar their game. Whether a greyhound be actually free, or whether he be loosed, does not make more than a few seconds difference in the time he will employ in working up to his hare. Again, the presence of a couple of greyhounds loitering behind, or trotting and stopping before you, or ready to run in the moment the setting-dogs find, or when you have fired at birds, mouthing the killed and wounded, and occasionally varying the performance by a free fight with the other dogs for possession—all this, I say, is not calculated to improve the shooter's aim, or, indeed, temper, for the matter of that.

Besides this annoyance to the sportsman, the greyhounds' presence disturbs the setting-dogs' coolness, and soon transforms them into "pot" dogs, that chase fur and stand no more for either fur or feather. Therefore for all these reasons, I would advocate the use of the slips, and work the programme in the following manner: One or two setting-dogs ranging before you; when birds rise, fire, and "bag" them in the usual way; but if a hare starts up, caution the setting-dogs to drop, and let slip the greyhounds. Then you can rest yourself a bit and watch the course with or without a field-glass, according to the distance which both coursed and coursers have traversed. If the greyhounds are, or if at least one of them is, trained to retrieve, so much the better, as it will save your man a deal of bother. This accomplishment, however unnecessary for match-coursing, is of paramount importance in practical coursing. By practical coursing I mean coursing for the sake of sport and game, and not for the decision of a wager. I have seen several Belgian greyhounds who knew so well, through sheer long practice, what the object in view was, that they in vari

ably caused their hares to pass inspection—*i.e.* to come past and within range of the guns, when of course, unless otherwise agreed to, one of the shooters floored puss. In this, however, I do not agree, and what I would insist upon would be shooting the birds and coursing the hares, and this rule not to be departed from under any consideration whatsoever.

There are some sporting-men in Belgium who do not take shooting licences at all; they merely get a licence for their greyhounds and go coursing leisurely, whilst smoking their morning pipes or cigars, with a stick for all arms of warfare. You see them going along the hedges, and tick! tock! whack! go their sticks against the branches, or else they look over the turnips and mangold-wurzels. Suddenly you hear them shout, "Ho! ho!" and off goes the dog or dogs. Where the country is bare, the sport is very interesting, but when frequent hedges intervene, then not only the dogs have more trouble to secure the hare, but to their owner the course is comparatively without interest, as he can see but little of the incidents and accidents of the running.

This sort of thing, however, is what I should denominate a placid pastime. The man need not be a good shot, nor a clever seeker of game, nor a nimble runner, nor a fair hedge-clearer, nor a good ditch-jumper; he may take it coolly, light his pipe when the game turns up, and await leisurely the return of his companions; he has nothing to do, but maybe he will bring back home at night half-a-dozen hares. This easily acquired game, however, riles his neighbours, the exclusive shooters, extremely, and the owner of greyhounds in Belgium need look sharp after his dogs and their doings, for the laws have been made very stringent, and if a greyhound even in pursuit of a hare trespasses on someone's land, the dog's owner may be prosecuted and fined.

This animosity is carried so far that the laws must be positively considered as antagonistic and adverse to the use of greyhounds in that country, inasmuch as not only the owner of a contravening dog may be fined, but all those persons that may be at the time with the owner and accompanying the dog incur penalties also! Nevertheless, this very fact that coursing appears, to some extent, to be tabooed, seems to induce and incite the Flemish fellows to course all the more, and quite rightly too I consider. *Chacun prend son plaisir où il le trouve*, and when a man pays £3 for a greyhound licence, the least I humbly imagine that he may be allowed to do with the dog is to use it for the purpose for which the licence has been granted to him and paid for.

The protection of game in Belgium is very stringent. Nobody,

under any pretence whatever, may use a gun before sunrise or after sunset; neither may greyhounds be used at night, of course. The shooting season begins on the 1st of August for marshes, and in September for general shooting. The season closes on the 1st of January for all shooting except marsh shooting. Shore shooting along the coast, however, is permitted all the year round, with or without a shooting licence. The cost of a shooting licence here, as in France, is forty-two francs, or £1 15*s.*, or thereabouts.

Some Belgian coursers do not beat their ground, but use bassets to range "all over the shop." These dogs give tongue on fur alone, and the moment the greyhounds hear them they dash ahead until they come in sight of the hare, when pussy's account is more or less speedily settled, unless she manages to elude the dogs. This style I should call hunting-coursing, if I might make so bold as to invent a compound word. But those men who not only use dogs for finding game, but also employ the gun, and, moreover, have greyhounds to make fur fly, might be expressively and explicitly said to be going hunting-shooting-coursing. I have been with several such parties, and I must candidly say that the judicious mixture of sports made me relish the fun immensely. The *contretemps*, moreover, were certainly not the least amusing events of the enjoyment, and a stubborn greyhound, with a temper of his own, is a never-failing source of merriment to those parties who don't care whether the game be intact or not, and who relish a doggy-row. I have seen one—a bitch—who was a caution. She had a most terrible temper, and was of a most jealous disposition. No matter what game it was, she was on it the moment it reached the ground, if a bird had been shot, or the moment it hove in sight, if a hare bolted. Thus, once, she swallowed a partridge and two jacksnipe before we could wink. I suggested that she should be led, as otherwise we ran great risks of coming home empty-handed. My plan was forthwith put into execution, and a boy belonging to our party took charge of our refractory customer. So far so good, and all went smoothly so long as nothing took place; but by-and-by we neared a ditch, out of which suddenly rose a teal, which was as instantaneously knocked over by one of our party. No sooner, however, had the shot been fired than the greyhound bitch, which hitherto had kept very quiet, flew off like a shot, dragged her boy down to his face, and pulled him along fairly into the ditch, where he had a ducking quite unexpectedly, and totally out of season. Then again, when coursing, this bitch, which did not retrieve, would not allow any other dog to do it either, so that each time a hare was

killed one of the *porteurs* had to run and save what remained of the hare! This bitch, however, was an exception to the general run of Belgian greyhounds. As a rule, those I have seen were good-tempered, ordinarily clever, but well trained as to their retrieving qualities.

Now one sees perpetually in the sporting papers inquiries from correspondents as to where they can get this or that kind of shooting, at a moderate price and within easy distance. May I suggest to these benighted brother-knights-of-the-trigger to try Belgium? If properly sought, there are shootings to be had in that country at purely nominal prices. I know one which is let at £12 a year, where 400 hares have been shot or coursed in one season. I know a small holding where forty hares were coursed and about 100 partridges shot, the shooting rent of which is £1 8*s.* a year. Twenty-eight shillings for forty hares and 100 partridges! I know other shootings more or less stocked with game that are let at very low figures indeed, and if several gentlemen were to unite and subscribe a sum of money yearly, they might agglomerate together such a number of farms as would form a most magnificent stretch of shooting for a sum which at home would be considered as ridiculously small. Game, being well preserved, is fairly abundant; living is not dearer than in England, and certainly Belgium is a country within easy distance and easily reached from any part of Great Britain. Here then is a field of action for those of our sportsmen whose purses are not long enough to allow them the hiring of a mountain in Ireland, of a moor in Scotland, or of a general shooting in England.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW TO SECURE SHOOTINGS IN BELGIUM.

So many inquiries have been made (since my article on "Sport in Belgium" appeared in the *Sporting Gazette* of February 21st, 1874) respecting the shootings to be had in Belgium, and how to set about securing them, that I will, hereunder, give such information as my experience may lead me to mention in connection with the subject.

First of all let me premise that it is absolutely necessary for the intending hirer of a shooting to ascertain, first, which part of Belgium would best suit his particular taste in the matter of sport, and, to facilitate this choice, I will briefly describe the land.

Along the coast are downs, with rabbits innumerable. So, to a "ferreter" I would say, any of these downs would suit you, as you cannot fail in any one of these to have such opportunities of blazing away at bunnies that you will do so, at first, until your head aches.

Beyond the downs are flat, uncultivated lands, covered with rough grass, and cut about by ditches, small streams, &c. Here and there are interspersed occasionally, on the drier ground, some ploughed fields and small farmhouses; lower still are the meadows and pastures, where cattle remain undisturbed during the season. To the lover of the longbills I need not say that this is the spot for them, as besides snipe, ducks, teals, golden and green plovers, wild-geese, curlews, widgeons, black-ducks, green and red shanks, dunlins, sandpipers, whimbrels, waterhens, coots (and occasionally wild-swans) are to be met with there in abundance, when the weather and the season are at hand. In the lower parts of these lands the ground is soft; not, however, treacherously boggy as is usually the case in Ireland. I mean that one would not get smothered in a fathomless bog-pit unless he purposely picked out

a place for it. In the great majority of cases the worst that can happen to the shooter is that he may go down in the ooze up to his knees, but there is no fear of his going any farther down. Of course, on such rough grass-lands, wherever it is all dry, one is bound to kick up hares, if one takes the trouble to look for them. We generally used to manage in the following way: We divided ourselves into couples, each two guns undertaking to walk the ditches or stream round a field or meadow, so as to bag the fowl therein as far as possible and convenient. Then, when the two guns met again after their semicircle, they beat the rank grass in the midst of the field for hares, and crossed the bogs for snipe or teals. In fact, to my idea, such mixed sport is far more interesting than ordinary partridge or grouse shooting. By-the-way, partridges are, on such lands as I am now speaking of, very fairly abundant, and as there are no hedges, or walls, or any other opaque divisions, separating the fields, one may follow the coveys, when flushed, a long way, by sight, and, as a rule, one may manage to get up to them, as long as one has the courage to do so. It is, however, whatever "the authorities on sport" may say about it, a very tedious performance, and, even were I to run against the general opinion, I confess that to go after a covey, time after time, does not appear to me so enjoyable as springing them up, unawares, or getting them pointed accidentally; for, in both the latter cases, there is a certain amount of *impromptu* which does not exist in the former case, and which, in my opinion, constitutes two-thirds of the pleasure of the chase; therefore, when I shoot alone, I never pursue a covey. The covey gone is not lost, and I would rather let the birds go, on the off-chance of falling in with them again, either the same day or another day, than start after them breathlessly, and then get my dogs to look for the birds, when, perhaps, by that time they may have run a good way off, and risen again, so that, in ten cases out of twelve, one has all the trouble for nothing, and one has, perhaps, also left a good spot, where many other shots might have been had, for a regular wild-goose chase, after the flushed covey. To those, however, who like it, there is, in the north of Belgium, no impediment to their practising it, for, as I have said, there are neither hedges nor walls to interfere with the sight, and the trees are so few and far between that a very little manœuvring, as a rule, prevents them from being an obstacle to the exact and correct "spotting" of a "settling" of birds. I have seen an intrepid man bagging thus, conscientiously, nine birds out of a fifteen-bird covey; but I did not envy him his pleasure (if there was any in it), for the

number of ditches he had to clear or jump, and the miles he had to zigzag about, were, to say the least, rather "pumping;" and, after all, I think such sport is more for the pot than for the fun.

Now, leaving that border of flat lands, and going farther south into Belgium, one gets among a magnificently-farmed country, standing second to none. Let those British travellers who have ever gone to Brussels, for instance, testify to the splendid state of the lands on either side of the railway lines, or indeed anywhere else where they may have travelled in that country, and they will, one and all, acknowledge that Belgium stands second to no country in that respect. The ploughed lands are kept as neat, as clear, and as regular as our own prize ploughmen keep our own. The gardens and orchards are miracles of neatness; in fact, one would go a long way to find another kingdom, big or little, doing as well, or better, in every way. However, to return to sport in the midlands, there are still here and there, the inevitable mill-streams, canals, and ditches, and in these one gleans occasionally a fair bag of wildfowl and snipe, but of course not so many as are to be got in the other zone of which I spoke before, simply because the ground is not so open as the first; somehow trees do not suit fowl, and then, as the land is highly farmed, the birds are disturbed more frequently—nevertheless, some are always to be had. On the other hand, partridges and hares are far more numerous than on the barren lands. As regards partridges, the practice of following up the coveys is there impracticable, on account of the hedges and numerous rows of trees that cut the landscape about on every side; and as regards hares, unless shot they take there a good deal out of a greyhound, for, as a matter of course, no sooner is a hare started than she makes off for the nearest hedge, through which she darts, and then flies to the next bushy wood or thicket, knowing full well that she will be safe there. So that greyhounds in that part of the country, to become clever, must necessarily take somewhat to lurching. It is amusing, however, to watch a clever Belgian greyhound with his master (I may say here, *en passant*, that all the Belgian greyhounds are of English descent, and some of them are magnificent specimens). They are all, or almost all, trained to retrieve, and the love of coursing is wonderfully strong among the sportsmen; so much so that in some parts of the country a very fair percentage of the best class inns and *cafés* trade under the sign of *le lévrier* or *aux deux lévriers*. The coursers are by far prouder of their greyhounds than the shooters are of their setters or pointers; in fact, the coursers hold generally in

contempt any dog that cannot catch, kill, and retrieve a hare. I have often been much amused by the controversies that would arise on that subject at the tables of those inns where the coursers and shooters happened to meet for refreshment.

In the field the greyhounds are not kept in slips, they are free like the other field dogs, if there are any employed, to find out the hares, and nothing to a sportsman is more interesting than to watch the greyhounds' respective behaviour, and how careful they are to be always on the alert.

If one goes still farther south, one gets into a wooded country, where dachshunds, straight-legged beagles, and hounds are of general use, and *pour cause* ; for no other dogs would be of much permanent use there. True, fields there are, of course, where partridges, quails (in the beginning of the season), and hares are found, but the greatest fun is in the woods, where woodcocks, pheasants (wild ones, mind, *rare aves*), roedeer, wild boar, wolves, foxes, stags, hares, &c., are fairly sprinkled. In that part of the land, however, one must live some little time in order to get individually acquainted with all the best nooks and corners of the woods, or else you must enlist a practical shooter or *porteur* in your service, otherwise you waste your time, your patience, and your money. A stranger who should reside thus, for instance, somewhere in or near the Luxembourg provinces, could not do better than secure the service of a *chasseur de profession* until he knows all the ins and outs of the ground where he shoots. Generally, whenever a *réunion* of shooters is decided upon, all the *chasseurs* of the neighbourhood are asked to take their share of the fun and of the expense. The latter is never much, the former considerable. For ten francs one may spend a most enjoyable day thus in the company of the *élite* of *joyeux compagnons*, and that is not dear, any way.

The way in which these *réunions* are arranged is this : Every sportsman brings his hounds, big or small, and all the dogs are slipped together in the woods, where a pretty music soon tells that they have something on foot. Thereupon, everybody following his own inspiration, runs to place himself on a likely passage, and he fires or does not fire, according to his good or bad choice of a place. Some men, through long habit and experience, know where the quarry will pass, or at least attempt to pass ; they place themselves in ambush close by, and soon the boom ! of their guns proclaims the fate of the hare or of the roebuck. I don't care much myself for that sort of thing as far as sport is concerned, but I like it well enough for the sake of the novelty of the thing, and for the sake of being with the continental shooters, they are such amusing

fellows, as a rule; beyond that, the whole affair is, generally, an awful humbug, for the "knowing ones" have all the fun to themselves and bag everything. Not so in a *battue*, however. And here, I must state that a *battue* does not there consist in standing at some corner and having the game driven to you, but it is managed as follows, viz. all the shooters enter the wood in a line with their beaters, and the whole lot walk through the covert and shoot whatever they can flush or spring. I must, however, state that several times I was desired to stand on the other side of the woods opposite the *chasseurs*, and I invariably then shot from my place at least twice as much game as any of those who had worked in the line. I do not say, mind, that I considered these performances of mine as interesting and as sportsmanlike as their own—in truth, I did not care for it; *to see game coming to you and killing it, is not, has never been, and never will be, sport*, in the strict acceptation of the term, as far as game-birds are concerned. Such a course of action is advisable for wildfowl or dangerous game, but that is all.

To resume: I have explained succinctly the sporting capabilities of the different zones of the country, I will now proceed to explain how the shootings are to be had. To one who does not object to the expense, there is no better plan than to pay a visit to a *notaire* of good position, and commission him to find out any suitable lands that may be then in the market. These *notaires* are extremely influential, and are sure to succeed. Some of them know always of some shootings to be let; but one must be careful not to employ a sporting *notaire* for that sort of business, because these sporting gentlemen practise very extensively the motto "take care of number one," and as, generally, they assume the privilege of sporting over the vacant lands entrusted to their care, it results therefrom that they are in no hurry to find a hirer for any ground that suits them; and, as in sport as well as in love all means are fair, they contrive to saddle you with some birdless ground, and exult thereat exceedingly.

On the other hand, there are some owners who advertise their shootings in the papers; some of these advertisements are worded in French, others in Flemish. I have one now, under my hand, which runs as follows (of course I translate): "To let, the Château Sainte Flore, near Furnes, with the right of shooting and of fishing over 5000 acres." Now, this advertisement was published last year. Whether the place, together with the right of sporting, is now to be let or not, I cannot tell, but it would be easy to ascertain. Howbeit, I just give this one *in extenso*, to show how such things are usually worded. The "Château," for aught I know,

may be a very ordinary house (no extraordinary contingency this, as I remember well visiting several places myself that were styled "châteaux," and which had nothing of a castle about them beyond the name, so that a word of explanation here was not altogether unnecessary).

Now I come to another class of advertisements, which occasionally offer very fair chances to intending hirers of shootings. I allude to the advertisements of lettings by auction. These appear irregularly in sundry papers, and the auctions are always entirely in the hands of *notaires*, who conduct them as they think fit. Sometimes one may be present when there are no bidders, or but one or two poor ones, or timid ones, who cannot or dare not go on with the bidding, although to their knowledge the place is worth ten times the amount bid for it. In such cases the shootings may be had at a nominal rent, so to speak. If, however, the man who gets it knocked down to him is not known to the *notaire*, a year's rent is required to be paid, there and then, in advance, in default of which the auction is begun over again. When there are no local bidders banded together in order to secure the place, one may get it very cheaply indeed; but when half-a-dozen or more local men agree to divide the expense, of course they don't feel the disbursement so much, and therefore the party they have commissioned to bid (and it is not uncommonly the *notaire* himself) bids rather freely, and they thus secure it. However, in such a case I would say to a stranger that he may safely go on with it himself, for so long as the locals do bid, it is because they know the shooting is amply worth both the money and the trouble.

Now, from all this it will be readily inferred that, like all other affairs settled by the same process, the cost of hiring a shooting by auction cannot possibly be foretold; one must first visit the ground, make up a rough account of its worth, and at the sale, bid up to that amount if necessary, and no more. It is, however, very troublesome and very annoying, besides being so uncertain. It is not pleasant when you have taken the trouble to go over the land and to attend the sale, to find the whole affair in the hands of a *notaire* who means to secure it for himself or for one of his clients. I have seen a sale of that kind, when, out of pure spite, a shooting was let at 1000 francs, whereas ten pounds were the utmost that had been bid for it, and for which it had been knocked down previously. There are however some, and in fact the greater number, which are clear bargains; but it requires always personal supervision. One must reside at the place if one wishes

to enjoy sport; otherwise, what with the local shooters and poachers, the wandering cowherds, and the rambling coursers, one's ground is at the mercy of everybody, and when you come full of energy and expectation, you waste the one to destroy the other, and then you declare that you have been swindled, and done for; whereas the ground in reality was fairly stocked, but being overrun every day by everybody, its stock naturally enough became few and far between. As instances of chead lettings by auction, I know a chain of downs which were knocked down at ninety francs (£3 10s.) where ten couples of rabbits have been killed in one morning, with only two wire-haired terriers for companions. I know also, in Luxemburg, a shooting which was let by auction last year for forty pounds where over fifty pounds' worth of game were shot in a month. It was let previously for twelve pounds.

Now however all these things are rising in price, and some Belgian shooters *fancy* that they don't much care what they pay—provided they get what they want; but their ideas of recklessness in that respect fall somewhat short of our own, and I should just like to see at an auction a couple of Englishmen, *aux prises* with some locals, for the possession of an enviable piece of ground, that is all!

However, to those of our shooters who wish to hire a shooting in Belgium, but to whom money is a consideration of some importance, I will say go first to reside in Belgium. It does not much matter where, provided you suit your views as to the sort of sport you prefer; *i.e.* for rough shooting and coursing go in the north; for partridge, hare, and quail shooting, go half-way towards the south; finally, if you love woodcraft, go in the south.

When once you are there knock about a little, go to the country inns and hotels, make friends with the men who keep them, and explain to them your wants. They always know some place to be had. Ask for the owner's address. Drive or walk there. If necessary take an interpreter with you. Be *very* sociable and familiar with the owners, and "strike the iron whilst it is hot." If you follow these instructions to the letter, you will secure the shootings very cheap, having them direct; but take care to have it all "in black and white," make your agreements binding on both sides, pay in advance for a year, it will spare a deal of trouble, get then and there your receipts, and you will be quite *en règle*. After that secure a place or lodgings for yourself, *as close to the ground as you can*; and if you don't enjoy yourself

thereon to your heart's content, it will be because you will have no *penchant* for sport, not that the sport was unenjoyable, for of all the foreign lands I have ever shot over, certainly Belgium carries off the palm, not only for quantity and for diversity, but also for cheapness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHORE SHOOTING NEAR OSTEND.

DURING the summer of the year 1873, I had as good a bit of shore shooting near Ostend as any man could wish.

I had been living there some little time, when one day, early in the morning, as I was getting dressed for breakfast, I heard repeated shots fired along the seashore. There was a strong westerly breeze, and the day was gloomy; altogether it was a fine rough day for sea-fowl shooting. So I determined to try and see what sport I could get there, and I accordingly altered my tactics —I dressed in the very worst of clothes I could find, and put on a pair of sand-shoes, so as to be ready for any emergency, and not mind a rush into the sea if needed. Meanwhile the file-firing was kept up briskly, and I hastened my departure. I had sent for a boy, as I wanted a porter to carry my provisions, game-bag, waterproof overcoat and gaiters, in case of rain; and just in the nick of time the boy appeared in his wooden shoes. I explained to him succinctly what I wished him to do, and he forthwith proceeded to sling the whole luggage and baggage over his back, then kicking his wooden shoes into the hall—

"I am ready," said he, and out we stalked.

We passed the Kursaal, now already deserted, the bathing season being nearly if not quite at an end; we went along the *digue*, and finally went down on the stairs and stood on the sands. One solitary bathing-machine was tenanted, all the others were gloomily hauled up against the hotel jetty, and the attendants looked anything but cheerful. The weather looked worse and worse; heavy clouds had gathered themselves towards Nieuport, and a drizzling rain began to come down with a steadiness that foreboded "staying powers." However, as we were "in for it," onwards we proceeded, and when we had passed the second bathing stand, I opened the breech of my 12-bore, and shoved in

two cartridges. Just as I was closing the gun again, I heard a shot fired ahead of us, and looking up I saw a man running towards the water's edge, and urging an immensely big black retriever to go in and fetch. This big Newfoundlander did not decline—at least as far as the going in was concerned; for he swam boldly into the waves, picked up the bird, munched it, dropped it again; and after this beautiful and exhilarating piece of work he came back very proudly towards his master, and when close to him he subtly and violently shook his shaggy coat perfectly dry or nearly so, and, *per contra*, drenched his master.

I was naturally highly amused by, and gazing at, this comical performance, when my boy, who was walking behind me, rushed up to my elbow: "*Voilà un oiseau qui vient derrière nous*," said he. We both dropped on the sand, and turning half round I spied a fine half-curlew coming at speed straight towards us. On he came till within about eighty yards, when he suddenly seemed to become aware that there was something wrong ahead, and he wheeled off to sea. Once there he seemed to feel more confident, and as we had not moved in the slightest degree, he passed parallel to us at a range of about fifty yards, when of course I dropped him. Without giving time to the tide or to the wind to drift him away, I went into the water myself, up to my thighs, and picked him up.

"That is a good beginning," said my companion, evidently delighted at the shot, and astonished at my rush in.

We passed the man with the retriever. They were still at variance together. The man was urging the dog, and the dog, who no doubt knew very well what he wanted, but had no wish to do it, kept on springing and barking boisterously round his master, but "divil a bit would he budge in the right direction," the sportsman observed aloud as I was passing.

Soon after we reached a village which rejoices in the name of Mariakerque and in the title of Sur-mer, although I am not aware that there existed the slightest occasion for this appellation being added to its name, as to the best of my knowledge, and after due inquiries, I firmly believe that there is no other Mariakerque in Belgium, so that there was no fear that the place could possibly have ever been mistaken for another.

Once past Mariakerque, we found ourselves in a perfect desert. No houses of any kind were to be seen as far as the sight could reach, and we were quite alone; on one side the downs, on the other the sea, before us the sand, stretching for ten miles without interruption; and all we could approach we might kill if we could. The downs were teeming with rabbits, but these are of

course tabooed. The tide was low, and here and there large pools of salt water had remained in the hollows of the sands. These pools we made a point of scrutinising attentively as we went by, and whenever we perceived birds running along their sides I went towards them, while my companion downcharged, waiting for my return, or at least until I had fired or the birds had flown away. We first met with a single large-sized sandpiper. I sprung him purposely to shoot him on the wing, then I missed him with my first barrel, to my utmost consternation and astonishment; but, in despair, I fired at him again, although he was very nearly if not quite out of range, and he fell. I reloaded quickly, for my shots had set other sandpipers on the move and I had soon a chance at a flock of about twenty. They came at a terrific speed, whirling and tumbling about, showing alternately their gray backs, when they were hardly discernible, then wheeling about and showing their dazzling white little bellies, wherein, when close enough, I poured a deadly double volley that floored seven.

Curlews then passed in small companies, but far out of range; so, instead of wasting our time in waiting for their coming nearer, we went on, as I had determined to go straight up to Nieuport, where I had been told that there were shoals of wildfowl in the harbour. So on we trudged, picking up here and there a bird or two, till the bag began to show very reasonable proportions, when we came up to the house that marks the point where the telegraph cable that joins Belgium to England is sunk. There I was informed that by crossing the downs we would soon reach a small village, whose name was unpronounceable, and where we could find refreshments *ad libitum*.

We took the hint, and again I found to my cost that the charges at the pot-houses or inns, or whatever they may be called, are simply outrageous; but as I was getting accustomed to that sort of thing I merely noted it mentally, as confirming previous experiences and observations; and having refreshed ourselves we resumed our journey. When we reached again the telegraph station the two men who are committed to its charge invited us civilly enough to walk into the guard-room, as the rain was then falling somewhat heavily. There we lighted our pipes and cigars, and we had a chat for about twenty minutes, when the weather cleared up again, and we thanked our friends and departed. My boy, who had been struck dumb ever since he had heard what the innkeeper had charged me for our snack, said then suddenly:

"I know why they are so dear over there," pointing with his thumb over his shoulder towards the village we had just left.

"Why, then?" I asked.

"Because they never see anybody at all hardly, so that when once they lay hold of someone whom they suppose to have 'the sack,' they pitch into him to make up by the sum they extort from him for the absence of numerous visitors."

Not a bad guess this, I should imagine, for a boy of sixteen.

Well, we had been walking without any incident of any kind for a quarter of an hour, when I saw far before us what looked like many stones or small mounds of sea-weeds close to the water's edge.

"I think I see birds," said I.

"So do I," said the boy.

Re-comforted by the sight of something to shoot (for nothing is harder to a shooter than walking without using his weapon, and we were beginning to feel tired and dull), we went forward as quickly as possible, and the nearer we got to the birds the plainer it became to us that there were several sorts mixed up in a large lot. Half-a-score of large, full-sized curlews were stalking gravely in the dry sand, close to the downs. In a pool, half-way between the downs and the sea, about fifty sea-gulls were basking in and out of the water; and close to the sea about twenty sea-pies, or oyster-catchers, were whistling and picking up insects. Mixed up with them, I should think at least a hundred sandpipers were feeding, running, and whistling *à l'envi*.

"By Jove!" thought I, "here is some fun in store. But let us see, there is no shelter of any kind between us and the curlews, so it is of no use trying to stalk them, as they would be off and away before I could get within a hundred yards of them. So that, as far as these curlews are concerned, in their present position nothing can be done. The gulls I could get within range of, but what good is it shooting them? I will try the oyster-catchers; and if I can get near enough to them, I have a fair chance of bagging at least a couple."

As soon resolved, as soon done.

We were then fully 200 yards from the unsuspecting birds. I motioned to the boy to stay where he was. He sat down, and I went forward. I kept my gun-barrels, as far as possible, in a line with the birds, so that no reflection from the bright gun might disturb my prey, and I walked in a stooping manner, swiftly and silently, with a regular step, towards the flocks.

All went well till I got to about a hundred yards of the birds, when the plaintive whistle of a startled curlew, soon answered by others, plainly told me that these, at least, were on the move. I looked up quietly without stopping or altering my walk. The

curlews were off, but the gulls had not moved, and the oyster-catchers were merely looking up, having stopped feeding. I stopped and downcharged. The birds soon resumed their meal, and I resumed my open stalk. Now I am at ninety yards. A few sea-gulls lazily rise and sweep the surface of the pool with their broad wings. The others are evidently getting aware that there is something amiss, for they lift up their heads. Two half-curlews, whom till then I had not perceived, are at fifty yards from me on my left and are looking at me quite unsuspectingly. Shall I fire at them? No; the numbers of the other birds tempt me, and onwards I go. The two half-curlews rise and sheer off, and I begin to think that I had been a fool not to have taken my chance of knocking them over when it was in my power to do so. Seventy yards! I grasp my gun tighter and tighter, for now the birds are at my mercy. I know my weapon's driving powers too well, and I feel certain now of my ultimate success. The birds, however, as I am getting closer and closer to them, begin to feel scared. One or two hindmost run up to the others. One of these flaps his wings; a sandpiper screams in alarm; all the wings are spread, sea-gulls, sandpipers, oyster-catchers, they all rise tumultuously; but I am within sixty yards— I stop, steady myself, aim ahead and atop of the thickest part of the flyaways, and bang! bang! off go the two barrels in almost instantaneous succession. Three sea-pies tumble down into the shallow water, two wounded sandpipers are running away, three more are killed. My boy runs up to help me; we first catch the two wounded pipers; we pick up the dead birds; and when this is done I perceive fifty yards farther a sea-pie on the sand close to the water, evidently a wounded bird, and I start up with the gun to bag it. However, to my utter astonishment, when I was scarcely twenty yards from it, a half-curlew deliberately comes down, and settling itself close to the sea-pie, begins feeding! Without loss of time I floor him. The oyster-catcher rises at the report, and I floor it too; but it is not killed as yet, and it starts up and runs tremendously quick. I reload and run after it; but I am soon out of breath, and without any seeming prospect of catching it unaided. So I stop, and calling the boy, I send him round to drive the bird to me. This he does successfully; and it came so straight to me, and so evidently tired, that, like a simpleton, to save a shot I tried to catch it. Of course it eluded my grasping hand, and bolted past me at full speed.

"That will never do," thought I, "so here goes something that will settle you." And I deliberately potted it, and picked it up without any further ado. We then proceeded to pack up our

game carefully in the net of my game bag, placing, of course, the larger birds at the bottom ; and, highly elated at our success, and anxious for more fun, we cheerfully trudged on. Nieuport pier was already discernible in the distance, and the number of sandpipers that flew past and around us was incredible. But I did not fire at them any more, reserving my shot for larger game. I successfully stalked two large curlews who were feeding at the foot of the downs, and bagged them right and left in good style. Nothing makes a man shoot better than when he has previously shot successfully ; unless, indeed, he becomes over self-sufficient and over self-confident, when he almost invariably misses everything.

After the two curlews had been safely housed we heard a shot, then another and another again, and we perceived that a large flock of birds of some kind or other, but whose species we could not as yet discern owing to the distance, had been fired at by two men, and were coming towards us, sailing swiftly along the seashore. I ran to the water's edge and there awaited their approach. As they came nearer we were enabled to make them out, they were oyster-catchers. When about thirty yards from us they turned towards land, as if anxious to settle there ; but in doing this movement they perceived us, and with a chorus of whistles they turned round again, and finally, being evidently at a loss as to what was best for them to do, they passed over our heads, when I fired and dropped one clean dead, then fired again and dropped two more.

"Two wounded ones are settled on the sands," observed the boy a minute afterwards.

"Where?" I asked.

"Close to that lot of sea-weed yonder," said he, pointing with his finger. "See them, sir, they are running."

"All right," said I. "I see them."

And I started double-quick towards the downs, so as to come up to the birds in a comparatively less startling manner. One I killed outright ; the other being out of range I could not fire at, but eventually, after a stern and long chase I reached it and killed it.

After that nothing of importance happened till we came to Nieuport, when I peppered a black-gull handsomely. The shot rattled on him like a handful of pebbles thrown against an empty tub ; but he crowded all sail, and no doubt to this day he wonders what this uncalled-for assault could have meant.

At Nieuport we found thousands of sandpipers, and there appeared at first sight to be nothing else ; but after a careful

scrutiny of the banks, where the mud was bare for a mile or so, owing to the tide being still low, we perceived, about 200 yards from us, a group of seven curlews feeding.

"Take off your load," I said to the boy, "and go round the meadow, behind those cattle yonder, until you reach the creek, then come round to the water and drive back the curlews towards me. I will wait here for them."

My boy instantly obeyed my directions, and with right good-will he executed my orders to the letter. I saw him reach the creek opposite the lighthouse tower, he then went down and disappeared behind the bank, but soon I perceived him coming on the mud along the harbour, and suddenly I heard him shouting lustily. Hundreds of sandpipers then took the hint at once and readily flew towards me. I let them pass quietly. Then I saw the boy getting closer and closer to the curlews. The latter, as if aware that the boy had no gun, or perhaps accustomed to being yelled at and pursued by the cowherds who keep the cattle on the banks, kept on feeding demurely until the boy was nearly upon them, when they rose, whistled scornfully, and came sailing down towards me unsuspectingly. I knocked one over with the first barrel and he fell into the harbour; the second barrel was a clean miss.

Fortunately I had reloaded, for when I went towards the water, to see how the bird that was there was to be got out, it rose again and came out with its legs hanging down, and no doubt it would have managed to escape in the downs and die therein had I not been ready to let it have a "settler."

There being nothing else worth shooting, I hailed a boat and we crossed over. We went into a *café restaurant* where we had dinner, and at 2 P.M. we came back to the harbour, intent upon returning to Ostend as fast as we could, as it was getting late, and we had fully three hours' sharp walking before us.

However, as fate would have it, an unseemly circumstance detained us still longer. The man who had brought us over pretended to make his own conditions for taking us back, and I was so indignant at such an imposition that, notwithstanding our fatigue, I declined to accept the man's preposterous terms, and had we had to walk ten miles more I would not have submitted to such an abominable *guet-à-pens*.

"He is a regular blackguard, sir," said the boy. "He asks what he likes because he is the only man who has a boat about here, and he thinks we are anxious to get over; but I daresay we will find someone to take us over, if we go up the harbour."

We according started along the sea-wall; seeing which, the

boatman shouted lustily that he would take us over cheaper. "Not on any terms," replied I, scornfully; and the crestfallen boatman scratched his head and saw that he was caught. Then his comrades, who had been till then watching the whole scene with anything but friendly demeanour towards us, jeered at him for his folly in having lost two fares. Meanwhile we reached a road inn, where we inquired as to the likelihood of our getting ferried over. There we were told that there was no one else who could do it but the man we had just left. Evidently this assertion was made according to a previous understanding between the innkeeper and the boatman. But I was determined not to be outdone, and a little farther on we came to the lighthouse, where the keeper very readily offered to take us over. I gratefully assented, as may well be imagined, for I did not relish at all the idea of having to walk two or three miles round the harbour to the town bridges. When he landed us on the other side, I rewarded the man, who seemed very pleased with his fares, and we set out for our return journey. It was three o'clock then; thus an hour had been wasted through the luckless boatman, whose company intending sportsmen will do well to eschew.

On our way back, I shot a few gray-plovers and a couple of enormous sea-gulls, which I intended to get stuffed, and when we reached Ostend at 7 P.M. we had a most tremendous bag with us. Now an occasional bye day like this is not to be despised. There are there lots of birds to be shot, and there are no game licences required or asked from strangers for shooting along the seashore; so that if the birds, when shot, are not worth a great deal, at any rate the expenses for getting them are next to nothing beyond the powder and shot; and the fun, to a man who likes shooting, is not without a certain charm. When it is fine, is there a pleasanter way of spending the day, when not shooting in the field, than wandering on the sands, with one's own gun and one's own friends, may be? As far as I am concerned, I am very fond of sea fowl shooting, and even should the sport be thought *de mauvais ton*, I boldly confess to a weakness for tumbling over the tough birds of the sea.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WILDFOWL SHOOTER'S PARADISE.

KIND reader, this paradise (as is but too commonly the case in most narratives) is not situated beyond the reach of any but a rich man. From London, for one pound sterling you may get to the place. Once there, you may enjoy yourself to your heart's content. The journey is pleasant and comfortable, and may be performed easily in fourteen hours. I won't keep you any longer in suspense. My wildfowl shooter's paradise is situated on the Belgian coast, at a little seaside town called Nieuport. This little town is about ten miles from Ostend, and there is a mail-cart going to and fro between the two places, so that there is absolutely no hardship to be encountered, no inconvenience to be put up with either during the journey or whilst residing at Nieuport. Though being such an out-of-the-way place yet it can boast of a church, a railway station, a kursaal or *établissement*, an hotel, lots of *auberges* or *cafés*, &c. &c. There must be no misunderstanding, however, as there are two Nieuports; but the one I should wish a wildfowler to visit, of course, is not the Nieuport town, but Nieuport-les-bains, as it is called. The most extraordinary part of the business is that the very inhabitants of Nieuport-les-bains do not know anything whatever of the sport to be met with in the immediate neighbourhood of their little place. Whether it be apathy, or want of enthusiasm in sporting matters, or whether they are really too poor to buy guns and to purchase ammunition to load them with, I know not; but during my stay there I never saw but one man with a 16-bore gun, and with that I need not say that he performed but very indifferently against the tough birds of the sea.

What is required for that sort of sport is a substantial gun, of powerful breech and large bore, and capable of carrying handsomely an ounce and a half or an ounce and three-quarters of large shot, at say eighty yards, and yet be a shoulder-gun.

And, by-the-way, I should recommend those shooters whose purses will not allow them to invest in such a gun at the prices charged by the fashionable makers, to explain their wants to Messrs. Tolley of Birmingham. These gunmakers turn out splendid double central-fires, 10-bores, of whose power and penetration I can speak from experience. I have seen and fired many guns, but never yet found any to equal the performance of the 10-bore that was supplied to me last season by the above-mentioned makers.

Somehow the Belgians have no large-bore guns, it is very rare indeed to meet even a 12-bore in the field, so that wildfowl, to a certain extent, are comparatively safe from the attacks of the natives; and I may safely say that I fairly astonished them when I showed them practically the resources of their sea-coast with a suitable weapon. I had been residing in Ostend for several months, and had been half-a-dozen times shooting along the shore, between Ostend and Nieuport-les-bains piers, and had often noticed the immense numbers of fowl that invariably were settled on the sand on the other side of the harbour; and though I made, as it was, very handsome bags indeed, yet I wanted something better still. We live in a time of progression. Forward! is the word. He who remains stationary must perforce fall back, and it is and always will be true as the poet has it—

> La soif d'envahir et d'étendre ses droits
> Tourmentera toujours les chasseurs et les rois.

I accordingly made up my mind to try the other side of Nieuport; and as I meant giving the sport a fair trial, I, one fine afternoon, took my seat in the Ostend mail-cart at 4 P.M., with my double 10-bore, and about a hundred cartridges. The cart stopped after a little more than two hours' run at Nieuport town. It goes no farther. I paid our fares, one franc and a half, or fifteen pence each, and the evening being fine I shouldered my weapon, my porter took the cartridges, bag and belt, slung the game-bag and waterproof clothes over his back, and putting our best feet foremost we crossed over the bridge, and trudged along the sea-wall that borders the harbour. Whilst on our way we met innumerable flocks going overhead inland to their feeding grounds for the night, but as I had understood, or rather I should say had been given to understand, that this sea-wall belonged to Government, and that it was forbidden to fire therefrom, I refrained from firing at the birds, though it went with me much against the grain not to do so. And consequently one may imagine my disgust when I was told subsequently that my shooting licence gave me the

right of sporting there. However, the information came too late for that time at any rate, and we reached Nieuport-les-bains at dark.

I had a friend of mine residing then at the place, and I forthwith hunted him up. He had taken a cottage close to the sea, and a prettier or wilder spot than the one he had chosen it would be hard to conceive. The house was built in the downs, and the rank, strong grass was growing all round it, just as if it had been uninhabited from time out of mind. From the windows, nothing but sea, sand, and downs on three sides could be seen, and on the other side, at some distance, were the houses composing the little bathing town. A few bathing-machines were drawn up high and dry, and the place had a most desolate aspect altogether.

At the best of times, I never saw in the streets of the little place during my stay more than a dozen people loitering about the square or the streets, and had it not been for a few trains coming in and going away daily we might have fancied ourselves anywhere beyond the reach of civilisation. The piers are built of timber, and project a good way out to sea. They are, however, sadly in want of a thorough repair, and though some few men seem to be constantly at work about them, the fruit of the said men's exertions is next to imperceptible. However, with this I have nothing to do. What delighted me above all things was, as we were having our supper out of doors in the cool of the evening, to hear innumerable calls all round about us, and to see occasionally, but out of range, a flock or two taking their course in the heavens. My friend was no sportsman, but he delighted in sportsmen, and his wife looked forward with pleasure to the numerous plumes and feathers that were to be her private share out of my future spoils.

We retired early. My bedroom windows overlooked the sea, and as the tide had come up the waves came gently rippling on the sands and shells (there are no pebbles there) to about twenty yards from the cottage. By-and-by, the wind rose and blew hard from the north-east, so that heaps of foam flew up, carried away by the breeze, and occasionally were dashed against the window panes like so much driven snow. The novelty of the situation to me was highly interesting, and I remained awake for some time listening to the mingled war of the wind and the waves as they fought angrily for supremacy. However, towards midnight there was a lull, and I fell asleep.

Early in the morning we were up and breakfasting. The weather was coldish and fine, and the wind had stuck to its old

quarter, N.E., so that everything so far was in our favour, and we soon made a start.

My porter was an adept at calls. He could imitate several birds to perfection, merely with his lips, particularly curlews, but he had also several very ingenious contrivances wherewith he could occasionally decoy almost every kind of bird within range. I never was myself an adept in the art. Somehow it does not come naturally to me. There are notes in nature which it requires considerable study and practice to imitate, and even then there are some which it is impossible to reproduce with anything like commendable faithfulness. Some men, however, who have from boyhood been living in the country, and who have made it their profession to decoy birds, come to reach such a pitch of perfection in calling that their imitations are so natural as not only to draw the birds, but actually to deceive the shooter himself. And, by-the way, I will tell you how it was that I had engaged that porter of mine. I was one fine morning at the end of the west jetty in Ostend, just smoking a cigar and watching some visitors, who were fishing, hauling up their nets, when I became aware that three men in blouses were looking at me and evidently talking about me. One of them was patting my setter bitch Jessie on the head, and relating to the others what he had seen her do from that very jetty, and after satisfying myself that the men were not likely to do the bitch any harm I turned away towards the nets once more; but suddenly there came close to us such a startling cry of a wounded curlew, that I turned instantaneously round, and so did everyone else, to look for the bird. But there was no bird to be seen, barring a few sea gulls just sweeping over the east pier, and swooping down to the surface of the water. I went and looked all round. There was no curlew. Then another cry was heard again, and this time so very close apparently that Jessie herself began to look flurried, and ran for the stairs, when the men burst out laughing, and one of them said to me:

"*C'est moi, monsieur.*"

"Then, by Jove!" said I, "you are a clever fellow, and no mistake. Can you call any other bird?"

In answer, he took from his pocket a thin piece of leather, and imitated a voracious sea-gull pouncing greedily on some food, and fighting for its possession, so capitally, that actually the real sea-gulls that were flying about congregated instantly towards us, uttering their shrill and plaintive cries.

I then entered into conversation with the man, and he agreed to come with me in all my future shooting expeditions.

This digression over, I now resume my narrative. As we were

stepping out of the house into the downs, previous to getting on the sand, we saw a large flock of gray-plovers just passing over the town, and going across the pier at speed, then circling round for some time over the salt marshes, and finally coming down and settling close to the shore among a lot of sea-weeds, through which they began running nimbly.

"Pity we were not a hundred yards nearer to them," said my man, "I would have brought them over our heads. However, they may yet come over."

So saying we stepped on the sands, I thrust two cartridges into the gun, and now began the tug of war. Flocks after flocks, companies after companies, wisps after wisps, passed over and around us. I never in all my life saw such a thing. It was like the retreat of a defeated army. There were shoals of sandpipers, tribes of curlews and half curlews, scores of sea-pies or oyster-catchers, and the sea about 150 yards from the shore was black with ducks and large sea-gulls, besides which, the horizon at sea was literally blackened by immense flights. I never saw such a quantity of birds. Turn where you will and look where you like, and there and everywhere were birds of some kind or another, flying or running, screaming, eating, or fighting.

My first shot was at a black-duck. He was close to the water's edge on the sand, in a little pool of water, just cleaning and shaking himself, ducking his head occasionally, and then spreading his short black wings and raising himself on his little stumps of legs. I knew he would not let me get very near him, so I changed my cartridges for two others for a long range, and leaving my porter to follow me leisurely, I started along the downs until I reached a long, hollow pool running parallel to the sea, and passing at a certain point within fifty yards of the unsuspecting "blacky," I carefully made a memento of that particular point, and without more ado went into the shallow pool. I stooped, and then ran up to the mark—which, by-the-way, was a lump of sea-weed—but when I reached the place I was that blown by the run, and the inconvenient posture I had been obliged to keep during the run, that I could not for the life of me have hit a haystack at thirty yards had I tried to fire there and then. So I sat down for a few seconds, and when I had somewhat resumed my usual equanimity I thrust my hat deep on my head, glanced at the gun to see if all was right, then, like the pigeon shooter going to say "Pull," holding the gun ready at the hip, and well planted on my legs, I moved forward and then peeped suddenly out of the hole. Up rose the black-duck, unpleasantly startled, and eyeing me suspiciously sideways as he

flew up, but his heavy belly and hanging legs were still ruffling the rippling water, when, boom! went the thundering 10-bore cartridge of No. 2 shot, and whish! went drops of water, bits of shells and sand, whacked into the air by the shot. I had stooped under the smoke in order to be able to send another dose if needed, but this was quite unnecessary. There was the duck lying on his back, and floating in the pool which he had not had even time to leave. (Those black-ducks, by the-bye, must be skinned for the table, otherwise they are so tough that it is next to impossible to eat them.)

Well, I picked up my bird, handed it over to the porter's care, and having duly reloaded, I proceeded to keep on a brisk file-firing on the sandpipers as they were flying past us in incredible numbers. The detonation had set them all on the move for the time being, and I fired half-a-dozen shots running before the stream ceased.

Then a flock of curlews we spied coming towards the sea from inland. There were eight of them. I ran along the downs until I reached a spot where they were to pass, and crouching behind a heap of sand and hiding in the grass, I knelt on the ground and got ready. The wind being somewhat strong, the birds were flying rather low, and came very unsuspectingly. However, I shall never forget the start I gave to the leader. He was coming, whistling very contentedly at the sight of the shore, when on his passing the top of the downs, and just as the impetus of their flight had carried him and his companions over my head, he saw me. He made such a jump in the air as to nearly send him heels over head, in the hopes of getting somehow out of harm's way; but the others, who had not as yet seen me, in the fright he gave them, actually swooped close to me, and then, as I rose, there was a *déroute*! Bang! into the leader went one barrel. Bang! into the brown of three who were in a lump sailing away. Two of those latter dropped dead, and the other one fell so low as to touch the ground with his long feet, and half flying, half running, thought he would manage to escape me, when he ran into the porter's legs. The bird had been blinded of one eye, besides other wounds, and most likely did not see where he was going till he found himself in the man's hands. Meanwhile the wounded bird had on being collared set up such a hullabaloo, and my porter, hiding himself in the downs behind a sand-hill, started such a series of calls that the remainder of the curlews came back, and dashed angrily towards the place where the man was, when I was enabled to approach them, and killed two more. The last one made himself scarce, and no amount of calling nor

the outcries of his comrades could induce him to favour us with another visit.

It was just then that a flock of plovers swept over us, when I fired both barrels in the brown, and secured eleven birds. The amount of killing these birds require is perfectly astonishing, and none but large guns with corresponding doses of powder can produce any marked effect in their flocks at anything like ordinary wildfowl ranges, where ordinary guns as a rule do not carry, or when they do, don't kill there and then. And that is just what is required, for the distance a plover will travel, if only wounded, before he falls, is well-nigh incredible, so that no gun but a regular crusher will pay for its ammunition with them.

True to our programme, we left the plovers where they fell, and we downcharged on the sands. Two or three of the birds that were not killed outright were fluttering on the sand, and my man beginning an enthusiastic and passionate call, the uninjured members of the flock closed their ranks once more and came back circling towards us. There they came, looking like but one single body, so compact they were; closer and closer still they come, while I grasp the gun tighter and tighter. The "calls" redouble in energy, the birds swerve, they will pass over us, they come, here they are! No, too far yet! they wheel away and disappear behind the downs. I am going to rise disgusted, but my man motions me to be still. I resume my position, one knee on the ground and gun ready, when whish! a brown cloud sweeps from the down over our heads. I fire without being conscious of what I am doing. I am aware that things plump and feathered have fallen and are falling over and around me, the cloud disappears, the birds have closed their ranks again and are gone, but on the sand around us a dozen dead birds are lying, whilst half-a-dozen more are running away to the best of their abilities, and as only disabled plovers will run. We collect our spoils; we sit down and rest awhile, for this picking up of runners has been warm work, and whilst I smoke a cigar and have a pull at the *madère* flask my porter tells me some of his "call" adventures with wildfowl in years gone by. Whilst we were sitting on the sands enjoying a well-deserved rest, we heard two shots fired almost simultaneously behind us in the downs. I clambered a sand-hill in order to ascertain what was going on there, but it was some time before I could make out anything of the shooter or shooters, owing to the numerous high sand-hills that bounded the view on all sides up to about a hundred yards or so; and the first intimation I had of the shooters' whereabouts was by their dog (a fine red-and-white setter), which suddenly popped over a hill in

hot pursuit of something. I got my glass out, and then perceived a hare badly wounded just climbing another eminence, over which he was going to disappear when the dog nabbed him. The hare squeaked as usual, and after a few concluding spasmodic kicks hung down dead from the dog's mouth. Just then a man appeared at the point where the dog had first come into sight, then another man popped up and then another. The first two had guns: the last one, evidently the keeper or porter, was carrying a heavy stick in his hand, and on his back was slung a capacious game-bag promiscuously filled up to the brim. The moment they made out the dog, the porter placed his hand to his mouth and shouted at the top of his voice: "*Apporte ici! Apporte!*" The dog obeyed instantly and was by their side in a moment. By that time my own porter had joined me, and we were exchanging remarks when suddenly the other party became aware of our presence, and I saw the gentlemen gesticulating vehemently and evidently in no soft mode.

"They are going to send the keeper to us," said my man.

And sure enough we saw the porter quickly unburdening himself of the game-bag he was carrying; he threw it on the ground, and swooping down upon us like an eagle, he screeched like a parrot.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed fiercely.

"What has that to do with you?" retorted my porter, with *nonchalance*. "We have no gun here, we have left it on the sand yonder, where you may see it if you will take the trouble to look; therefore we are doing no harm, and we have as much right to be here as that cowherd yonder."

"Ah! *Sacré* this! *Sacré* the other! We will see about it!" replied the keeper furiously, as he returned to his employers. Then he had a long confab with them. They all wound up their arms about them just like a windmill's sail-beams for a minute or two whilst discussing the matter; then finally they shrugged their shoulders, and with an indignant look they all went their way, whilst we laughed fit to kill ourselves, the whole thing was so absurd. After they had disappeared we tumbled down the hill and resumed our excursion. The tide was halfway up and coming rather quickly. Of course many parts of the sands were already surrounded by water, thus making a succession of little islands whose surface was still uncovered by the tide, and I was not slow in availing myself of such points of vantage, for I perceived that many of the birds (particularly sea-pies, half-curlews, and curlews) flew very close to the outer edge of those islands, fancying themselves, I imagine, far out of range at sea, on account

of the shallow water covering the sands halfway up to the downs. Without hesitation, and somewhat to the astonishment of my man, I deliberately waded up to one of the largest islands, and when I reached the other side I turned my back to the wind, downcharged on the sand, and with gun ready I watched for any stray customers.

Some time elapsed before any bird was confiding enough to trust itself in close proximity to me; but by-and-by, when a dozen flocks or so had passed me unmolested (because they were too far away), it inspired the succeeding files with more audacity, and some began to come nearer than the first; then others, emboldened by impunity, grew positively audacious or careless; and at last I had the satisfaction of seeing a column of sea-pies coming to me as straight as an arrow. "These," I thought, "will get it hot!" and I was getting accordingly ready when they suddenly stopped, wheeled towards land, and settled themselves on the sand about a hundred yards from me. I turned my head halfway round to mutely impart my disgust to my companion, when I saw him going along the downs with all speed, and signing to me to be still; on he went, till he was fully another hundred yards past the birds, when he then went down towards the water. The birds stopped feeding, as soon as they saw him going towards them. One of them called. All the others nimbly ran up to him, and with heads erect they watched the man. On he came, till he got to about fifty yards from the birds, when they, with a whistle, flung themselves up from the sands, headed the wind, and resuming their travelling file, came towards me at full speed. When within sixty yards I aimed at the leader, but I bethought myself that firing thus at him would be next to useless, as he was just like an arrow coming to me, and therefore the shots would have but little chance of going into him, so I waited a second or two longer, and then I fired. On the report, they all swerved to sea, and I fired again. They redoubled speed, and that is all I saw of them that day, although on the next day we picked up a dead one on the shore, brought there by the tide, I presume.

"Come away, sir, come away quickly!" I heard my porter shouting to me.

I wistfully gave up gazing after the now gone birds and turned round, when to my astonishment I found that I was now entirely surrounded by water, and that the brine was already oozing under my feet. The sea had risen so rapidly, that all retreat was now entirely cut off, apparently.

"I will have to swim for it," I thought; "but what about the gun? I can't leave it behind me."

"Lose no time, sir, for goodness' sake!" cried my man, run-

ning along the water's-edge, and tearing his hair by the root: "come away at once. *Tout de suite, monsieur, tout de suite, ou vous êtes perdu!*"

"The deuce! Am I, though?"

There was no mistake about it. Every instant the water rose higher, and I was now standing in it up to my ankles. Another strong wave came up, and I was in up to my knees. There was now no dry spot visible, and at least eighty yards of foaming water separated me from land. I quickly took off my cartridge-belt, and holding it up in one hand and my gun in the other, I began my journey back. Up to my thighs—now up to my stomach—than a wave comes up, and goes over my head, nearly upsetting me. Gun and cartridges are now thoroughly drenched, and I need not care any more about preventing their getting any wetter, as wetter they could not be, so onwards I push—when I nearly lose ground. I glance round; a huge wave is coming, and it will certainly take me off my legs if it overtakes me, so I spurt forward. Hurrah! The ground is rising, rising again, rising still. I begin to feel confident, when down I go into a deep hole, head first, gun and all, with the threatening wave breaking atop of me! When I rise again my hat is floating away, fortunately towards the shore; the salt water nearly blinds me, and dribbles away from my beard and moustache in a continuous stream; but I am safe this time, and five seconds more see me safe and sound, but very, very wet, standing beside my porter, who is nearly crying.

"*Dieu soit loué!*" says he, fervently.

And I say "Amen!" to that from the bottom of my heart.

In all my perambulations I have doggedly kept a tight hold of my gun and cartridge belt, and we now proceed to repair damage, but of course any further shooting for the time being is out of the question. The gun-barrels are gritty with sand, the cartridges are now soaked, and even if they should be serviceable, shouldering a gun in my wet clothes would be to me positive misery. So I drink a good glass of wine, and we start double quick towards home.

On our way we pick up my hat, and an hour afterwards I am sitting at the dinner-table, in some of my friend's clothes, whilst my own are being got dry.

"You have had a narrow escape," they all said to me.

And I believe them.

"Two or three visitors (bathers) have been drowned on that coast," I was then told.

So to anyone reading this, who should ever chance to try the spot, I say emphatically, and from experience: "Beware of the rising tide on the soft sands!"

After dinner (none the worse for my ducking) I went to the Kursaal with my friend, and we had a game or two at billiards, after which we went on the jetty for a "blow."

And it was blowing then, and no mistake. As a matter of course, I had brought my gun with me, together with some of those cartridges which, having been left at home, had escaped submersion. No birds but sea-gulls were flying by, and these I did not fire at.

As we were, however, watching the innumerable duck-tribe companies that covered the sea as far as the eye could reach, wondering where such countless multitudes could come from, and wishing they would come a little nearer, I saw two large divers coming slantingly, but certainly, towards the pier where we stood. We stooped out of sight, and I popped my gun-barrels under the rails. Nearer and nearer came the divers. At last one entered the harbour; he dived, and reappeared within fifty yards of me, when I let fly. The bird was entirely covered with the pellets, but he nevertheless disappeared, and we could not see him anywhere. After vainly endeavouring to make him out, we went again to the pier's head. A lot of Dunkerque fishing smacks were now coming over from Ostend; the whole fleet, in fact, as is usually the case were sailing together, and as they came with the fair wind dashing their fat prows under the sea, the spray flew over their decks and rigging like a mist. It was picturesque enough to see them, but I daresay it was uncomfortable for those on board; however, as they came they disturbed the flocks. One by one they rose and flew back out of the boats' way. Then the mail-steamer from Dover to Ostend came in a contrary direction; and caught between both, so to speak, the birds were so bewildered that many passed within a hundred yards of us, and some actually close enough to be shot. I, however, only killed two, a mallard and a coot. I fired, nevertheless, all the rest of my cartridges.

You see I had an awful wind to contend against; then the spray nearly blinded us, and the gun-barrels were dripping with brine, besides which, water always deceives, as far as estimating distances goes, and the birds at the best of times are a tough, swift-flying set, and as hard to kill as caymans, so that my want of success can be satisfactorily explained so far.

The two birds I had shot were picked up ashore, by some men who were at work (or were supposed to be) a little higher up the harbour. One of them brought them to us, as well as the diver we had lost sight of, and thus ended my first day's sport on the Nieuport side of the shore. I must have fired at least eighty shots in the course of the day (for about a score only were in my

cartridge belt and had been put out of service by my ducking in the sea), and I had the following birds spread in the evening on the table, viz.: A mallard, a coot, a black-duck (called there *macreuse*), a diver, two redshanks, one greenshank, five sand pipers, six curlews, and twenty-nine green-plovers. As the whole of the latter had been killed in but a few shots, I make out that I must have fired on an average four shots for a bird.

This does not sound like clever work, does it? But then sea-fowl shooting is known to be the sort of fun in which the greatest amount of powder is burnt, together with the least quantity of average telling shots. Still, as sometimes a lucky shot or two may bring down numbers of birds, as was my case, altogether the total amount comes to be pretty fair, and for fun and wild sport it beats anything I know, when one does not mind hardships, and takes the weather, incidents, and accidents in the spirit in which they should be taken, *i.e.* just as they think fit to come, and not mind them.

L'homme propose et Dieu dispose. I had intended stopping two or three days, and when I had brought with me a hundred loaded cartridges I thought I should have been plentifully provided for, and lo! after the first day's sport I was left without one! Powder I could get, such as it was (for the quality was but indifferent): shot could also be procured, but 10 bore central fire cartridge-cases were not to be had at any price, not only in Nieuport, but in the whole of Belgium, where such a size of cartridge is altogether unknown, and, in fact, where it is not even manufactured, the largest bore made being No. 12. I had plenty of cartridge-cases in Ostend, but how to get them over I did not know, unless I went myself, and, to tell the truth, I did not feel equal to the exertion. Nieuport is but ten or eleven miles from Ostend, but I was too tired to undertake walking that distance. As to horses and conveyances, there were none to be had for love or money. True, the mail-cart leaves Nieuport once a day, but that once is early in the morning. As for the trains, they take you such a roundabout way before landing you in Ostend that you are nearly three hours underweigh, and I did not feel equal to the undertaking.

Well, we were debating the *pros* and *cons* of the question at issue when my man came to us, and said that there was a fellow going to start for Ostend in a *dog*-cart, who was willing to give him a lift all the way, and he would go and fetch all requisites if I would send him. Of course I gladly assented, and gave him full instructions and directions as to what he was to bring, and where he would find the things. I also told him to bring my setter over, and we accompanied him a little way to see him start.

Do not suppose, kind reader, that the aforementioned dog-cart was what we understand by a dogcart on this side of the water. It was a little wee bit of a miniature two-wheeled concern, with just room enough for two men to sit on back to back, fore and aft, and no more: and the motive power was not a horse, nor a mule, nor even a donkey, as you might be led to suppose, but three strong, ferocious-looking, big dogs, harnessed like ordinary cattle, but, of course, in a primitive sort of a style; one, the biggest (and also surliest), was in the shafts, and the two others were harnessed somehow by its sides. The whole three were lying down when I first laid eyes on them, and a more unpromising lot to travel twenty miles or so with it never was my lot to look upon. However, when we entered the yard where they had been *put to harness* they all jumped up and barked so vociferously, and with such a startling unanimity, that it almost made us jump. Their master came out at the row, and soon silenced them by summarily hitting them on the head with his whip. This man was a big fellow; my porter was not a very light man either, and I could not help pitying the poor dogs who were to pull both all the way down to Ostend and back.

However, carts drawn by dogs are, in Belgium, national institutions, sanctioned by the law, and therefore are not to be snubbed; but, somehow, I cannot bear the sight of a dog (even if he be a cur) being made to draw. How the poor animals can stand it, I don't know, I am sure. I should fancy that their paws' underskin would soon get worn out, and then, what then? The thought makes one shudder. Howbeit, both men got in the cart.

"*Es-tu prêt?*" said the driver to his companion.

"*Oui,*" replied the other.

"Then, *en route!*"

And with a crack of his whip and a jerk of his reins, up sprang the dogs, barking and bounding away, and, pulling with all their might, the lot soon disappeared at the turning of the road.

We then walked back leisurely, and after partaking of an early supper I retired to rest.

The wind had dropped altogether, and a greater contrast to the preceding night it would be hard to imagine. The silence was so great that all the murmurs of the village reached my ear distinctly—*i.e.* the clanking of the shutters, the bellowing of the cattle, the bells on the goats' collars, the cowherds calling after each other, and in the distance I could hear the sea rippling softly on the beach. The moon rose as I was undressing, and as

I was looking out of my window admiring the wild scenery and listening to the evening rural noises, I could not help saying to myself: "Would to Heaven that my lot had been cast here, on this spot! how happy I could be!" Such was my great love for all places wherein sport was to be had. But of course it was all nonsense. Man has something better to do than to spend his life in the pursuit of fowl, of whatever kind and species; but still, explain the whys and wherefores—who can? There was in me that odd feeling, that the peacefulness of the place, joined to the sporting fun to be met with thereat, suited this child to a T, as the Yankees have it.

About an hour before dawn I was awakened by a repeated knocking and scratching at my door, and when I opened it in rushed my setter, Jess, overwhelming me with her caresses. On the landing stood my porter, with a large parcel in his hand.

"You will find everything in it that you told me to bring," he said on handing it to me.

"You must be very tired?" I asked him.

"Oh no!" he said laughing. "Many a time have I been poaching all night, and have had to work all day afterwards."

Nevertheless, I sent him to rest awhile.

In the meantime I dressed, and then proceeded to make my cartridges. By-and-by the inmates of the house arose, and the servant soon came up to say that breakfast was ready. The weather was completely the reverse of that of the previous day. The wind was S.W., the sun was hot, and there was not a cloud. The sea was like a mirror, and, to all appearances, the fowl thereon had if anything augmented in numbers.

We found a good many shore-birds again on the sands, but the duck tribe were unassailable, as they wisely remained at sea, far out of range. I, however, had two shots which deserve special mention. The first was at a porpoise, but of this more by-and-by; the second was at a large sea-gull, under the following peculiar circumstances: I saw it coming, but I would not even have shot at it had it not been for its singular appearance and the controversy to which it gave rise between my porter and me.

"What is that sticking out of its beak?" I said. "Do you see it?"

"Oh! some worm of some kind or other," said my man.

"Well, it is a very stiff worm, then," I said, "for it sticks right out like a bit of stick. Besides, why does not the bird eat it, if it is a worm? As a rule, sea-gulls do not go knocking about with their food sticking out of their beak when once they have got it: and, moreover, if it were a worm, the other sea-gulls, his neigh-

bours, would soon have a snatch at it, and be thankful for the job, too."

"*Vous avez raison, monsieur*; what can it be, I wonder?" rejoined the man, convinced by my specious arguments.

"We will soon know," I said.

So I cut off the bird's flight four or five times, until he had to pass over me, and then I knocked it over. We then found a hook, a quadruple one (I have it still in my possession), firmly stuck through the upper mandible. Evidently it had not been long stuck in, for it was covered with blood, coagulated it is true, but still evidently freshly drawn. My man then said he wondered the bird had escaped, and he then told me that such hooks are baited with fish all along the coast by the villagers, purposely in order to catch the birds, whose feathers are highly prized, and whose flesh they eat. So much for the sea-gull.

Now for the porpoise. We saw it about a hundred yards from the shore, apparently rolling head over heels like a basket tumbled about by the tide, and thereupon another controversy was started; my companion asserted that he had fired himself at a good many porpoises, and had also seen others doing the same, but with no result whatever.

"Then you did not aim straight," I urged.

"I am a pretty fair shot, though," he said proudly.

"Or, perhaps, your charge was not strong enough," I added; "well, at any rate, I will try at this one, just for the sake of the thing."

So saying I went ahead and waded up to a sand-bank in the way of the porpoise (the tide was receding then). When the animal came up towards me, I watched him intently, and the moment he popped his head out to breathe, I pulled both triggers at once (to make sure), and there he was, a dead coon. He kicked convulsively and splashed about considerably, dyeing the water round about him; then he stopped, and his belly came uppermost occasionally as the tide rolled him about, so we watched for a chance, and when he eventually drifted in shallow water we brought him ashore. He was about four feet long. The shot had penetrated under the eye, where it had gone in like a bullet. This speaks volumes for the gun, showing how tight it must have shot.

Some men from a village close by came to us, and begged of me to let them have the fish (or rather animal), and I did so very willingly, when they instantly collared it and disappeared across the downs; what they did with it is more than I can tell.

On our return to Nieuport I took Jess with me, and went flight-

shooting in the evening. I took my station behind the bank that runs along the harbour, and I managed to bag four ducks and a teal, but if I had had several companions I have no doubt the average would have been far better, as the flocks passed incessantly at eve for half an hour at least.

Some sportsmen were on the other side of the harbour, and I heard them fire a dozen shots or so; howbeit, on inquiry the next day, I heard they had only bagged a duck.

The next day I borrowed a boat, and wasted half the day to bag one bird by trying to get up to the flocks as they sat on the sea. That was a mistake. One must have a properly fitted boat and a swivel-gun, or heavy shoulder-guns, for that of sort of work.

However, taken all in all, I enjoyed myself amazingly during my short stay, and it was with undisguised feelings of regret that I turned my back on Nieuport-les-bains, perhaps never to see it again.

In conclusion, I venture to acknowledge that a great deal of my success was due to the gun I used, and I cannot praise it too highly nor commend its makers too much for it; for of what earthly use would it be for a man to employ all his energies in order to circumvent the fowl, and then use all his skill to knock them over, if the gun he uses cannot kill them? It would be but a disheartening waste of time and money, and, withal, but a miserable farce.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ROUGH SHOOTING IN BELGIUM.

Most people like a little variety in their pleasures, and I confess that in sport I consider it a great treat to have to deal with a mixture of birds, and to meet also with a few hares and rabbits.

Hence, to me a day's rough shooting has, I must acknowledge, more attraction than a day systematically devoted to the stubbles or to the moor. I like, in shooting, the *imprévu*; I delight in meeting with unexpected cases, and to me there is an extraordinary amount of interest in the fact that when the dogs look fussy and on the alert there is no knowing what they may spring forth.

Partridge-shooting and grouse-shooting (over dogs, I mean, of course) are two very interesting sports; but, somehow, it is always either *perdrix* and *perdrix*, or grouse and grouse; and it becomes at last a little tame, do you know.

I think it a mistake for shooters to persistently quarter their ground day after day merely because the season has opened. They ought to vary a little, go to the marsh once on a time, or go rabbiting with the terriers, or else ferreting. Not only do these little changes afford fun on their own deserts, but they also make you relish the more substantial sport more keenly, and that is an advantage not to be despised. Besides which it actually rests you a bit, whilst, as a rule, after two or three days spent in perambulating the moor or the manor behind the dogs, one is apt to feel a little stiff and unwilling. It stands to reason that, though a man may be most anxious to go on as before, two or three hard days' work at last tell on his limbs; and he cannot, however willing and anxious he may be, resume the sport with all the freshness of the first or even the second day. Hence the failures that one may sometimes notice, even amongst the most enthusiastic shooters when they have been fagging a little too much. There is no

longer in the aiming and firing that instantaneousness that insures heavy bags; one gets slow, and consequently one gets disgusted. Whereas, with a little judicious "go" at the marsh, or in the warren (particularly the latter), a man may take it easy, because the sport is essentially a lazy one, and rest himself whilst enjoying the fun. I am as enthusiastic in shooting matters as most shooters; but I confess that two or three long and consecutive days on partridges are enough, and that the general fatigue that pervades my system on the fourth day makes me feel as though I had had enough of it. In fact, I lose, for the time being, all relish for the sport.

It is at such times then, that a little rough shooting is no despicable entertainment, and the greater variety of game, the greater the diversion; and that is partly the reason why I so much like Belgium as a field for sport. In the same field I have over and over again shot four or five varieties of birds, and withal, bowled over a hare or two; and if you happen to be shooting close to the coast, a few minutes' walk brings you into the downs, where rabbits are literally teeming.

Last season (1874), I had hired there a very fine stretch of ground, but illness prevented my going over to enjoy it. I cannot therefore speak of its actual capabilities; but the previous season, when I had had the trial of the place, though in December, I obtained a first-class day's rough shooting thereon; and to give an idea to my readers of the resources of the place, I will relate to them what we did on that day.

First of all, let me describe the ground. Imagine, kind reader, a sandy, hilly place, covered with a short, rough grass, and interspersed here and there with rabbit holes. Towards the sea a range of high sand-hills, where rabbits are positively swarming. In the midst of the whole, and going to the sea, runs a brook about two yards wide in its narrowest part, shallow rather, and spreading here and there over some flat, morassy pieces of ground, where reeds and short grass alternately grow. Farther on there is a small gully, thickly covered with brambles, short trees, bent grass, and the like, a regular place for spaniels to try their luck in. Beyond this valley comes the farm, a large one, with its meadows and ploughed fields beyond, which stop my limits. I held the right of sporting from the owner direct, much to the disgust of the village swells, who previously used to course the hares and shoot the birds pretty much as they liked, when the owner or his friends did not turn up on the ground by 10 A.M. Now, when I had secured the place all that was altered, for although I was unable to shoot I had a friend there, who looked after the place and shot over it.

And, by-the-way, as I honestly think that the farmers ought to have some little interest in the game that is reared on their farms, I made it a point that the farmer should have some birds, or a hare, or a couple of rabbits each time I or someone else should sport over the estate. The consequence of this arrangement has been that, not only does the farmer himself abstain from interfering with the game, but he would look badly on any one of his men who should do so, and this wholesome supervision keeps the whole village in check far better than three keepers would. Indeed, during the summer season the farm labourers found several nests, whilst harvesting or cutting the hay, and though formerly they used to take away the eggs, that year they were strictly forbidden by their master to do so, and as a consequence the stock of birds was formidable. Well, to return to my first expedition to the place. I drove straight from Ostend to the farm with the owner; of course we both had our guns, and I had brought with us one of my dogs, a setter-bitch, that had been given me by Mr. Kedwards, and a better one to make a bag with no man need wish to have.

When we reached the farm we had breakfast there, and finally, accompanied by the farmer and his son, a lad of some seventeen summers, who led along the owner's greyhound, we made a start for the day's sport.

"If you please, gentlemen, to come this way," said the farmer, "we will try these turnips."

We accordingly turned to the right, where an immense square turnip-field spread itself for fully 200 yards each way. We went in it in the following fashion: I walked outside it; next to me and twenty yards away was the boy, holding his greyhound; next to him was his father, and then came Meinherr Van Something-or-other, an unpronounceable name at any rate.

Before we had gone many yards a very large covey rose from that part of the field that we had left behind us on our right, and we all stopped to watch its flight. They flew on and on over the stream, and then went down in the aforementioned gully.

"They are safe there," said meinherr; "we will get them easily."

"We had better go at them now," I suggested.

"Just as you like," said he, "but I generally find that when once they fly there, they remain in it for some time."

"In that case," I said, "let us beat this field first."

My bitch was evincing just then a remarkable interest towards my side of the turnips, and she came crawling up and up like a cat, then she stood-stock still. Whirr! went three partridges. I floored two, and the other one fell to my companion's gun.

"*Goot! Goot!*" I heard the two Flemish peasant fellows saying to one another as they ran to pick up the birds.

The boy, however, when in the act of placing the birds in my bag, which he had slung over his back, suddenly remained motionless and staring on the ground near his feet.

"*Oh, meinherr, meinherr!*" he said to me with most intense excitement: "*A haze! meinherr! a haze!!*"

I could not make out at first what he meant. Then the thought struck me that in German, *hase* means a hare, and that most likely the same word expressed the same thing in Flemish; so I hastened forward, and sure enough from within five yards of the boy's feet sprang a monstrous hare. The boy in his flurry let go the greyhound with his slip. The dog, of course, instantly caught his paws in it and went head over heels, when, to spare any further trouble, I shot the hare. The boy was well blown up by his father, and we went on.

Four more partridges came into the bag before we left the turnips, and then we went to the gully in search of the others.

Of all the rum places for partridges to get into, this was one.

Imagine two lines of high sand-hills fifty yards apart, and running nearly parallel to each other, making a very narrow and deep valley, thickly covered over with thorny bushes and brambles, mixed up with rank, strong, bent-grass, and you will have an idea of what the place looked like. "A place far more fit for rabbits than anything else," you will say, and so it was, for the moment our heads popped over the sand-hills four or five bunnies, who were basking in the sun, scampered off. One, however, was not quick enough, and him I bundled head over heels down the hill. He, however, was not quite dead, and but for the bitch I should have lost him. She, however, had seen him, and that was enough. After him she went, but in so doing she went slap into the covey of birds, which now rose in complete disorder. Bang! bang! bang! and bang! Such firing was never heard in the place before, I will warrant. Four birds were killed, and there was "a runner."

The bitch, on hearing the guns, had left the rabbit to run to the rescue, and she tracked the bird well up to the roots of a bramble-bush, wherein and amongst which it had hidden its head, thinking, no doubt, it was quite safe thus.

After that I went again for my rabbit, for I was not going to give him up. I called the bitch to the little path which it had taken under covert, and sent her in. She went in with great fury, shaking the bushes as she went along, whilst I with my finger on the trigger, keeping pace with her outside, kept watch for anything

that might come out. Suddenly the bitch dashes under the thick covert like a demon, and she fairly yells with pain, as she evidently has pricked herself, and flop! whack! whist! out comes a woodcock! Bang! I miss him. Bang! Missed again, by Jupiter! But no, not quite, for the bird suddenly shuts its wings, goes down against the embankment, the shock makes it rebound in the air, and it rolls down two or three yards when it is stopped by a large bunch of wild-grass. We all run towards it (for a woodcock is a rare thing to find in the north of Belgium), I pick it up, and we all handle it.

"I should not wonder if we found some more," I said; "I vote we beat this place well."

Accordingly, after finding and picking up the rabbit, the two guns walked along the hills, whilst the two men and the bitch went down and beat the bottom of the gully. I shot another rabbit, my companion killed two, and finally when near the very last thicket he had the good luck to spring himself another *bécasse*, and he shot it cleverly.

"Do you know," he said to me, "I never before looked for woodcocks here! I thought these birds frequented only large woods."

"Generally they do," I replied; "but many birds, when tired by their long journeys, settle anywhere for rest along the coast, and a better spot than this for a woodcock to rest in cannot be desired. At any rate I should always look for some here in the season; but you want either some beaters or some good dogs, or both, for that sort of work. However, we have not done badly at all, so far; where shall we go now?"

"Well," he said, "are you a good shot at snipe? We always have some along the brook; we will go there, if you like."

"Nothing could suit me better," I said; "let us have a glass of *madère*, and rest a bit, and we will go."

Whilst we rested, the boy took home the greyhound and all we had shot—no inconsiderable weight already—and on his return we all went towards the brook.

"There is a pool," observed the farmer to me, "where generally teals do come when there are any about."

"Where is that pool?"

"Behind this bank yonder."

"Well, stay here then, and I will go."

My companion had gone round towards the source of the stream, intending to beat it down whilst I should beat it up. I reached the bank, and was in the act of glancing at the gun to see if all was right, when I caught sight of a shadow going up in front of

me above the bank. It was a redshank, and he was closely followed by his mate, but they were too far for me to shoot. The bitch, however, had caught sight of them, and as I had instinctively shouldered my weapon, she, thinking no doubt I was going to fire, bolted up the bank and down the other side, when "quack, quack!" she flushed three ducks! The first I killed clean, and he fell in the brook; the other shot was a miss. The bitch brought ashore the dead duck, and at the same time she got a rap on the head for her previous reckless behaviour.

Then I went along the stream, and a hundred yards farther I came on the first snipe. I floored it like a man before it got much more than four yards off the ground, and three rose on all sides when I was reloading without giving me a chance, and that made the worthy farmer swear with a vengeance. I could not catch very well the meaning of what he said, but evidently he did not bless the birds. A little higher up a greenshank got up from the sand, and he was *dood*, as the farmer expressed it, before it knew what on earth was the matter.

My friend, meanwhile, accompanied by the boy, had been doing pretty fairly too, judging by the firing in his direction; and finally, when we met near the little wooden bridge and compared bags, we found that we had altogether nine birds, including a moorhen, a duck, and a greenshank; the rest were five snipe and a jacksnipe.

Now, I don't call that bad for a little brook (or, at least, I should say, part of a brook) about a mile in length. This part, however, is the best, and it is very rare, I was told, to find snipe beyond it. Naturally enough the birds prefer settling near the sea to going up any way inland, at least when they are on their travels.

It was dinner-time then, and to get to the farm quicker we took a short cut across the flat downs, where a couple of rabbits were killed, and where we met with a large flock of peewits. These, however, were very wary, and though we tried hard, it was some time before we could succeed in clipping any of them. Not that they are much good, but they look well in a bag, with their long tufts of feathers on their heads, which gives them such a wild and weird appearance. Besides which, though nothing wonderful for the table, yet a lapwing pie is not very despicable, especially when you chance to have a cook who knows what she is about, and does not "do" them to a cinder.

Well, these blessed lapwings led us a pretty dance over the barren land, and though we tried two or three long shots we could not bag any. So I hit upon an expedient. We hid behind a low

hill, and I sent the boy round the heath to drive them over to us. I told him to take my bitch with him on the string, and never to let her go until I should sign to him to do so. I knew the dodge would answer, and explained its working to my companion, who did not at all understand what I meant to do. "You see," I explained to him, "when the boy is just opposite that windmill yonder, I will show myself and whistle for the bitch. The moment she catches sight of me of course she will come tearing along straight towards me. In doing so, however, she will have to pass right in the midst of the flock, and all the birds will rise, *pronto* after her, and follow her angrily, as you will see. And if we keep quiet and remain concealed, they will come with her right up here over our heads, so that if we keep cool we are bound to bag two or three, I know."

"That is a very good idea, indeed," said my friend; "yes, now that I think of it, I have often noticed that lapwings always seem angry when dogs cross their path, and that they sometimes hover over them, quite close to men or to houses; but I should not have thought of that dodge."

"That is a very common trick in England," I said, "but now to business, for the boy has reached the windmill, so let us get ready."

I then went up the little sand hill, and waving my hat, I saw the boy unfastening the bitch and pointing me out to her. She, however, did not know what he meant, and was fairly going to retrace her footsteps, in order to trace me, when a shrill whistle from me brought her to a standstill. She looked around, and then saw me. The moment she spied me up she came, right clean through the flock, which, as I had predicted, rose indignant and with great clamour pursued her, swooping angrily close to her head, and making her wonder, I daresay, what it all meant. Up they came, whirling and tumbling about, and we killed three easily with our first four barrels. Then, by throwing one up, we enticed some of the flock to come back again, and we bagged two more.

After that, tired and hungry, we struck work and went in to dinner. The first thought that struck me in that jolly day's sport was the presence of so many partridges on the estate, although the season was virtually drawing to an end. Up to the very last day sportsmen there find partridges, simply because they do not try to destroy all their stock at the beginning of the season as we do on our own side of the water. In fact, all over the preserved lands in Belgium there is not much difference between the bags made by the shooters during the first and the last weeks of the season.

Now this is what I simply call sensible wisdom. There is there none of that reckless fever that devours British sportsmen, and induces them to kill whatever they know to be alive on their manors without loss of time or delay.

Shooters in Belgium take their pastime as it ought to be taken—coolly, as a means of pleasure, not as an end to game, and it is a great pity so many of our own sportsmen have adopted another way of thinking. Now, considering the sport intrinsically, do you not think, reader, such a day's sport as the one I have related a thoroughly enjoyable one? I do, and I confess I would rather shoot twenty different kinds of birds if possible than twenty birds of the same species. Besides, rough shooting has always in it an element of wildness which the orthodox and sober shooting in worked fields does not possess, and such wildness and weirdness have for me an indescribable charm which, perhaps, more than anything else, to my mind, lends enchantment to the sport.

There has been a great deal of controversy about the sizes of guns best suited for rough and ordinary shooting. I think a heavy large-bore gun quite unnecessary there, as the birds are neither tough to kill nor do they keep out of range as wildfowl along the coast will do: therefore, what need is there of overloading oneself with a heavy gun? Shooting over dogs is quite a different matter to shooting game that you see coming, and that cannot possibly turn up *à l'improviste*. In the latter case one may keep one's gun on one's shoulder until needed for work, whereas, in the first case, to be successful one must be "on the ready," finger on the trigger most of the time. Such being the case, a heavy gun soon knocks up a fellow. My own gun for field and rough shooting is a very light Damascus barrels 12-bore gun, that weighs a little more than a gingham (*plaisanterie à part*, I don't think it weighs more than 6 or 7 lb.), and it stands to reason that a light weapon of that kind is brought to bear on anything at any time almost as soon as it heaves in sight, and that is just what is needed for that sort of sport. The barrels are only twenty-eight inches long, and it kills dead most things within fifty yards of its sweep. No greater range is needed, I think, and it is a great treat to have a gun that never tires you, even in the longest summer day's sport; in fact, three-fourths of one's pleasure depend in such cases on the lightness or heaviness of one's weapon. At least, that is my experience on the subject.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUMMER SHORE SHOOTING.

I DO not know, reader, whether you are or not as enthusiastic in sporting matters as I am, but let me tell you, *en confidence*, that I never go anywhere without at least one of my guns, and that whenever there is anything to shoot, whether it be a quadruped or a bird, I do not trouble much about its species or value, but I forthwith set about trying to shoot it just for the fun of the thing. I am, besides, rather unsophisticated in my general ideas, and I take my pleasure *où je le trouve.*

Now, when one goes down anywhere to the seaside for the bathing season, it is to be presumed that bathing is, *primâ facie*, at the bottom of the excursion; at least with me that is the motive power, but if there should turn up some other desirable enjoyment, and the two happen to be easily combined together, why not *faire d'une pierre deux coups?* why not enjoy both?

There is no earthly reason why not, and, on the other hand, there is a good deal of sound common sense why it should be done, and therefore I do it. Now I like sea bathing immensely, but to enjoy it as I understand it, *i.e.* have four or five baths a day, comes rather expensive when you have to take a machine each time. And, after all, what privilege does the hiring of a bathing-machine confer upon you—merely the comfort of undressing in private, and of bathing with a crowd.

The former is a *sine quâ non* of propriety, and so forth; but to tell the candid truth, I don't mind much whether my costuming be done strictly privately or not, *ma vertu n'est pas facilement effarouchée*; and as to the other advantage, that of bathing with a lot of bathers, to me it seems to be a very dubious one, and I would rather do without it, even when ladies are in close proximity, as, indeed, is the case all over the continental bathing places, where men and women dip each other in neighbourly (and, I may say,

unseemly) fashion. However, *des goûts et des couleurs*, 'tis useless to discuss; and, since it is so, let it be so for those who like it.

As for me, when I am at a continental sea bathing town, as I was last season, I generally hire a boy or a man to act as my porter. I place in his care my bathing costume, game bag, waterproof contrivances, &c.; I take my gun, and we start forth in quest of whatever may be found fit to shoot on the sands. When the fancy takes me I exit in the downs, where, in due privacy, I don the proper and conventional attire: then I have a go at the sea, after which I resume my clothes and my stalk. My bathing is far more entertaining to me thus than it would have been had I remained in the town: the expenses are just about the same, as I give my porter so much daily for his services, but I have the pleasure of shooting combined with the luxury of bathing. That is not a bad dodge, is it?

Well, last August, I became acquainted, during my excursions on the shore, near Ostend, with a young officer in his Belgian Majesty's service. He was but three or four-and-twenty, was a lively young fellow, and I took a liking to him. He, too, was fond of sport, and we often started together for some of our rambles. Occasionally we varied the performances by a sail in one of the Ostend open boats, when we would have the men fishing, or else we would take a trip to some neighbouring town on the coast.

Thus it happened that one day we sailed to Blankenberque, a small bathing town situated at about seven or eight miles from Ostend; but as fate would have it, the wind turned foul, and by the time we were ready to embark for our return journey, our boatmen shook their heads, and declared it to be an impossibility. "What cannot be prevented or altered had better be endured with cheerfulness," I remarked, "so let us have a stroll about the place, and if the wind does not alter we will go home by train this evening."

We agreed to that, and accordingly we went to the jetty, then on that part of the sands where the bathing takes place, and there we had a bath.

By-the-bye, some of the machines there are simply delicious. The one I had was fitted with a carpet, a looking-glass, and an armchair, the windows had panes of glass, they could be opened at will, and they were adorned with curtains; altogether it was quite a treat to have such a pleasant concern, after the rough-and-tumble rickety things they call bathing-machines in a good many other places, but particularly in Ostend.

Moreover, there were great numbers of visitors in the little

town, and it was quite entertaining to watch the promenaders as they went up and down on the bricked sea-wall.

By-and-by, however, we heard some shots fired, and we saw some large flocks of curlews going towards the west, and hugging the shore as though they were going to settle there on the sands.

"Well," I said, "if this is not a caution. There have we been all the morning almost, tossing up and down in that nutshell of a boat, without being able to get a shot at one single bird, and now here are birds by hundreds on the shore! Let us go after them."

"*Allons-y*," said my companion.

We made our way to the boat, but we found it unapproachable; it was stuck high and dry on the mud in the midst of the harbour, the tide being low, and our boatmen were not to be seen anywhere.

We asked some fishermen who were lounging by whether they knew of any device whereby we should be enabled to get our guns and ammunition from the boat, when a little boy came forward with two planks, and managed, by placing them successively in front of each other flat on the soft mud, to reach the boat in safety. But how was he to come back with the guns and cartridges? That was the question; and the question was a poser, to put it mildly.

"Sling one of the guns on your back and try," I said to him.

"Are the guns loaded?" he asked in return.

"You are a cautious youth, I must say," retorted my companion, "take up the gun and do as you are told, instead of wasting your breath in humbugging nonsense."

Well, the boy was frightened and began to cry. We looked at one another and burst out laughing.

"The guns are not loaded," I said to the boy, "and look here; if you look sharp and be quick you will have a franc."

"Where is the franc?" asked he, then wiping his nose on his sleeve.

"Here, and see, I will give it to this man here for you."

"Don't you do that!" shouted back the boy, in great trepidation, "he would not give it to me, bless you! No, keep it yourself. I will trust you!"

"I am highly honoured, I am sure," I said gravely, and with a solemn bow.

Meanwhile, wound up by the sight of the shilling, the boy set to work with alacrity. He bundled on his back both the guns and the bags, and made his way to *terra firma* safely.

"Now," said he, "where is my franc?"

"Here it is," and I gave it to him.

"Then, here are your things."

And he delivered them then with alacrity.

After that we had with him the little chaff usual under similar circumstances.

"Any more children besides yourself in your family, my boy?" I asked him.

"Three, sir."

"Are they all as sharp as you?"

"Eh! what?"

"Are they all as clever as you?"

"Hum! Don't know what you mean," &c. &c.

We left him wondering whether we meant it as praise or otherwise, and I daresay to this day, the problem to him is still unsolved.

We made our way to the shore, and naturally, in so doing, we had to cross the downs. We had not gone five yards over the rank grass, when I nearly trod on a rabbit. Off he went, kicking up his little heels.

"Anyone looking?" asked my friend, but before I could reply —bang! he went at bunny, missed him, banged again, missed him again.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought I, "and since we have fired, and as such are liable to prosecution, let us at least bag something;" so bang! I went too at the rabbit, missed him, banged again at an awful distance, and rolled him over.

"Go down on the sands," said my companion; "I will pick him up."

I went on the shore, accordingly, and there I found myself face to face with a *douanier*.

"Shot anything there?" said he, in French, with a wink.

"Me not comprehend," I retorted, with many gestures.

"*Oh! vous ne comprenez pas. Ah! vous Anglais?*"

"*Oui.*"

Then he went on amicably in his own language for a considerable time without taking breath, and we parted the best of friends.

A little higher up, my friend came out, and we both agreed that the *douanier* was not to be feared, as evidently he had nothing to do as far as watching the downs was concerned: so we went in again, and bagged three more rabbits; the *douanier*, evidently thinking that it was all right, went his way without bothering his head about us. Now, see what force example carries along with it. Had I been alone I would not have thought of going shooting

anywhere without the right of so doing! but seeing my companion going in so boldly, and rightly judging that now we had fired, if caught, we should be fined just the same for twenty shots as for one, I went at it with great glee, and I acknowledge that I enjoyed the fun.

Decidedly, our neighbour's apples are better than our own, as the saying is, for I never enjoyed shooting four rabbits so much in all my life. We saw several flocks of curlews a mile or so farther on, but perceiving by the flags on the pier that the wind had turned fair, we beat a retreat towards the harbour, where we found that, the tide having come up, the boat was now afloat, and our men waiting. So aboard we jumped, up went the sail, and out of harbour we flew.

We agreed, however, to come back on the following day; and in order to give the shore a fair trial, it was arranged that we should get my porter to come with us, and we would walk all the way down from Ostend to Blankerberque and back again.

Accordingly, early next morning the three of us made a start; but everything at first went wrong. The tide was coming up, and though for some time the sands afforded us a firm footing, soon the rising sea drove us higher up against the downs, where the sand was very soft and very loose: and there we were plodding along under a broiling sun, and not one single wretched bird to be seen for miles. *En revanche*, plenty of rabbits were scampering away along the down, and of these my companion clipped a couple just before they had time to disappear over the sand-hills. We had, however, to leave them where they were shot, as a man was keeping watch over us, my porter saying that he knew the place where they were, and would pick them up on our return journey—which he did not, by the way; but of this more anon.

Well, we had a bath, some lunch, and then started again. The first legitimate shot was at a sandpiper. We saw him running along the water's-edge, and though he rose several times out of reach, he got tired of being pursued, I suppose, for he finally got up, and flying out to sea he turned towards us, evidently with the intention of going behind our backs. We all stopped and downcharged, and as he passed within easy range I shot him. The sea was as smooth as a looking-glass, and I thought the rising tide would bring the bird ashore; but after watching it for a few seconds, we saw that the wind was drifting him away instead of the tide bringing him up, so the porter went in and retrieved him. It was a fine fat bird, and we met soon with a flock of his companions. These, however, eluded our approach for a long time, and there being now no sands visible but along the downs, it being

high-tide, it was not easy to get at them. However, we hit upon the following expedient. My companion was to go ahead with the man until he could either shoot at the birds, or somehow get them to act as the first bird had done, when I should pop at them, as I was to remain behind about a hundred yards or so. The plan succeeded well. Gerard (that was the officer's name) eventually managed to get within firing distance, killed one bird and wounded another. The firing, moreover, had the effect of breaking the flock; some of the birds kept ahead, but the greater number, after a circling or two over the sea, came towards me. I knelt down, kept still, and floored three. One of these, however, was only wounded, and I had a pretty chase after him before I succeeded in laying hold of him. He had climbed a sand-hill, and was going to disappear in the downs when I dashed my hat at him, smashed the hat and stunned the bird. I picked up both, and was putting my hat into its original shape, with a few judiciously applied punches in the inside, when the downs keeper, thinking, no doubt, he had got me that time, rushed up to me breathlessly.

"*Quel est votre nom?*"

"Eh? what?"

"What is your name?" said he.

"What for?"

"*Vous êtes en contravention.*"

"Go along with you, *farceur*, *en contravention* for picking up a sandpiper!"

And I held the bird to his nose.

"You were rabbit-shooting," said he, "I saw you."

"You confounded —— (something or other), how can you tell such fibs! You don't expect me to kill rabbits with my hat, do you?"

"You had a gun?"

"On the sands, yes, I had one, and there it is against that piece of timber yonder!"

This convinced him, for a wonder, and he went away, with my parting advice that he ought to get a pair of glasses, as evidently his sight was sadly impaired.

I turned once more towards my companions, and had gone about a couple of hundred yards, when I heard the keeper again shouting behind me, and turning round, I saw him coming again at full speed, but that time with one of the rabbits shot previously by Gerard, and which he had just found.

"Ah! ah!" he exclaimed triumphantly, when he got near me, "I have caught you this time!" and he held up the rabbit before me.

So I put up my glass and examined it critically.

"Evidently," said I, "this fellow did not die from the small-pox. But what has it to do with me?"

"You shot it?" he exclaimed.

"Did you see me shoot it?"

"Well, no, I did not."

"Well, you will have to prove that I shot it before you can get me fined. Good-morning!"

And that is how it came to pass that we never got those two rabbits, for, eventually, he found the other one also.

I daresay he kept his own counsel in the matter, ate them, and said nothing to anybody, for we never heard of it afterwards.

About halfway to Blankenberque we began to fall in with numbers of shore birds, and that cheered us up a bit. We bagged a few pipers, but when about half a mile from our destination we perceived that, behind the six or seven breakwaters that are there made up to keep the sand from invading the harbour, a lot of curlews were settled. We tried to stalk those behind the first, but we did not succeed. Before we could get to them they were off, but they settled again behind the fourth, and that time we managed to bag three, after which, there being not a bird to be seen, we went in the town and had some dinner.

Whilst discussing our meal, the question of our return to Ostend came on the *tapis*.

"It is really too hot to walk back," I said. "Let us hire donkeys and ride at least half the way."

We did so.

Now, I know that grouse-drivers and deer-stalkers occasionally ride to their mantlets or stations, therefore riding when shooting is nothing new; but I think we may fairly claim the honour of having been the first shooters who ever went wildfowling on donkeys! Howbeit, we found it very handy, for I doubt much whether, after our previous fatigues, we should have been able to walk back all the way.

In fact, we liked it so well that in most of our subsequent excursions on the sands we invariably made it a rule to procure a small cart drawn by either a pony or a donkey, under the management of a boy, and we found it still more convenient than riding each a Jerusalem pony, for we bundled into the cart everything we did not actually require, as well as whatever we shot. When no birds were to be seen, we took our seats and drove farther on, so that it was really then enjoyable to go long distances, and if any of my readers ever try that experiment, I will be bound to say that they will be thankful for the hint.

SHOOTING IN HOLLAND.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN A DUTCH FEN.

Last January, whilst I was staying in Belgium, a lawyer with whom I had become acquainted quite accidentally offered me a letter of introduction to a brother-in-law of his who resided in Holland, and who was the lucky possessor of as fine a fen as ever any man may wish to roam over. My acquaintance with the lawyer originated in the following manner: I was, one morning, in company with a Belgian shooter, driving through a village on our way to our shooting, when we met such a crowd in front of a house as to preclude altogether any attempt at going any farther until room was made for our horse and vehicle. The crowd were attending a sale by auction, and the sale was conducted by the aforesaid lawyer, who no sooner spied us than he very kindly stopped the bidding to allow us to proceed, and intimated to his hearers that the sooner they allowed us to go by, the quicker he would be enabled to resume business. We thanked him, and drove on. In the evening, on our return, when we passed through this identical village, we met the gentleman waiting for his own trap, and we gave him a friendly lift part of the way, until in fact he fell in with his man. This led us into conversation, and our conversation led to the offer I have stated above, and to which I assented readily, as may be imagined. I had just received from Messrs. Tolley, of Birmingham, a double central-fire 10-bore gun, which I had tried along the shore on the sea-fowl, and with whose capabilities I was so taken that I was most anxious to see what it would do in a good fen.

Well, one fine morning in February I took my departure, and after travelling for I don't know how many hours, and changing

carriage I could not tell how many times, I finally reached my destination. At the station was the lawyer's brother-in-law waiting for me in his covered *carriole*. The covered *carriole* (or *carry all*, as the Yankees term it) is a two-wheeled cart, substantially covered over with strong panels, and completely water and storm proof. In this concern I snugly ensconced myself by the side of my host, who was a pleasant-looking fat gentleman about forty, and off we went bowling along the flat roads until we reached a crossing that led to my host's house. That crossing had been planned right across the fen, and a more likely ground for wild-fowl I have never yet seen except in Lincolnshire. From the road, and as we were driving, we saw hundreds of ducks (both common wild ducks, black ducks, and teals), hundreds of curlew, and dozens of flocks of plovers, whirling about, settling, or flying across the fen. "What an awfully jolly place," I thought, "and won't I pepper them to-morrow!" My host spoke a little English, and that badly: but as I was as anxious as he was that I should understand him, we got on together wonderfully well, considering the many disadvantages we were labouring under.

Dinner discussed, it was about 4 P.M., and Meinherr Three-stars said: "Birds come to marsh, you go with me." And I went. He had a single gun of English make, which he prized eminently. Unfortunately it was a muzzle-loader, and it bothered us not a little to have to stop until it was reloaded after each discharge. His dog was a large-size poodle, with ears fully fifteen inches long, and curly all over. That dog was very clever and his intelligence remarkable; but then he was fifteen years old, and as he had been shooting with his master ever since he was big enough to take care of himself, of course he was bound, somehow, to turn out extra good. And he was A 1: of that there is no doubt. We began work as soon as we left the gate. We cleared the road-side ditch, and found ourselves in a meadow, soft and oozy at places, where I felt so convinced we should meet a snipe or two, that I loaded with No. 8 shot. The dog remained at heel throughout. Meinherr went to the canal, for he "shoot not snipes" he said, and I was left alone in my glory. Unfortunately, it was rather late, already the shades of evening were deepening behind us, and I never regretted more that such was the case than I did that evening; but still, I had an ample compensation for it on the next and following days. Well, I went sideways across the marsh. Tchiek! tchiek! bang! down. Tchiek! bang! down too. Boom! from meinherr's gun, and I see a teal bounding on the bank and tumbling in the canal, when the dog jumps in and brings it to his master, whilst the latter is reloading.

The noise had set the flocks on the move, and one of these comes our way with incredible speed. We squat, and the dog down charges, the birds pass between us. Meinherr cuts one down handsomely, and when they swerve on his shot I nail one too, a mallard, and as he comes down, broken-winged and open mouthed, I send him the other barrel, and thus put an end to his troubles. The dog picks up both birds, and takes them to his master, who quietly picks up his own, and says to the dog in his *patois* that the other one does not belong to him, and points me out. Gravely, the old doggy listens and looks. Deliberately he mouths the duck and comes to me, when he sits down and offers me the bird. "Bravo!" I call out to meinherr, whose heart opens at this praise of his dog: for it is a remarkable thing that all thorough gentlemen shooters on the Continent are far more proud of their dogs' achievements than of their own. I have frequently heard such say: "I am a muff, but my dog is a good one. It is a pity he is not in the hands of a first-rate shot." Well, I shot another snipe, and we came to a large ditch. I looked out for a means of egress. There was none. Meinherr looks, walks back, runs, and jumps. He lands on the other side, with the dog in close attendance. I pick out a place, jump too, and I land very nearly on a jacksnipe, who escapes scot free, though I tried to bring him down with a barrel. Meinherr joins me then, and offers me a drop of something strong, which I pretend to drink to please him, but which in reality I spill on the ground when he is looking round about the sky. He looks at his watch, and says that it is time we should get *en place* for the evening flights: and as he stalks rapidly along the bank I follow him, wondering where he is taking me to. We reach a point of the marsh where an old stunted willow-tree is growing, and opposite the willow is a small island, on each side of which runs a stream. Meinherr picks out a jumping-pole from the thick grass, and gives it to me, points out the little island, and bids me go over. Now, it was fortunate I had taken the precaution, when ordering the gun from the Messrs. Tolley, to tell them that I wished it to be fitted with sling-hooks, for I knew it was impossible to jump broad ditches with a pole, unless both hands were free. I slung the gun on my back, and went over safely.

"Now," said my guide, "look!"

"Look where? and for what?" I asked him.

"There—there!" and he pointed to a lot of reeds.

I went to look, and found a tub sunk in the ground, covered over with a wooden flap, and completely surrounded by reeds. I understood it all then. This was a flighting tub.

"Shall I go in?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"But yourself?"

"I have got another," he intimated, and he went away.

I got into my tub, pushed away a few of the largest reeds that were too much in front of my eyes, and I soon spied some flocks about. Three teals came, but they passed wide of me, and finally they went to my friend's tub, when he brought the leader down. A minute or so after five ducks came in Indian file, and the moon being just behind them made them appear quite near, whereas they were a long way off. I, however, meant to have a try, and I killed one. The time he was coming down, however, proved to me that the height he must have been at must have been considerable. The flight lasted about twenty minutes. I shot nine ducks and a teal; my companion bagged seven birds. It was then so dreadfully cold that I was very thankful when my host came round, and we made tracks for home. But the poor dog, what must have been his sensations of bodily comforts, or discomforts? He had retrieved all our birds from water, and though it was not frozen over, yet it was bitterly cold, I will warrant. Howbeit, when we got home, he went to the kitchen stove, and, after a good meal, curled himself round, and plunged into doggy dreams of sport.

After supper, my host lighted the proverbial Dutchman's pipe, whilst I smoked a cigar, and we retired early, because we intended starting early in the morning for the hut, with the call-ducks, and try our luck at that sport.

The moon was shining brilliantly when I retired to rest, and as I looked out of window I saw that the flocks, if anything, had increased, and that promised good sport for the morrow. But what a funny place for a private gentleman to choose to live in! Right in the midst of the fens, and no neighbours for two or three miles; it was truly a sportsman's abode. My host had told me that he shot with his single gun over a thousand ducks every season. As for snipe, he did not look for them. One of his men—and a proficient fellow he was, too, by all accounts—snared them, and it was no uncommon feat for him to come home in the morning, after his rounds, with thirty couple hung up on his game-stick, besides plovers and lapwings in abundance. The seashore, close by, was also covered with birds, but nobody shot them, and no one ever went there, except occasionally a stranger or two, who, when the weather was very cold, came there straight from the neighbouring towns for a day's sport or two.

I knew well enough what *calling* ducks was, for I had been at

huts before, many a time, but I had never seen the decoying practised as I saw it done there by my Dutch host. I must not, however, anticipate. Early, very early, we were up. The snipe snarer called me up, and when I went down I found my host ready for breakfast. In a corner was a basket garnished with straw, and in it were three ducks and a drake ready to be taken up. We went at about 4 A.M. If I had not had my companions for guides I should certainly never have reached the hut, even if I had known where it stood. It was so dark and the ground so impracticable, except in the places that are always used as paths, that none but a man thoroughly acquainted with the place could possibly have managed to find his way without innumerable tumbles into the ditches, pools, and canals that cut the ground every fifty yards or so. Howbeit, we reached the place safely. The hut was built of reeds, was very low, and long enough to hold us all, as well as the dog, who went into it professionally and curled himself up in his corner, close to the entrance and ready for action. The snipe-man settled the ducks on the water, but the drake was brought in, and a little box fitted with a lid and containing oats was also brought in. The sheet of water before us was, as near as I could judge, about sixty yards long by fifty wide, and a finer piece of open water there was not in the whole fen, hence its great attractive power to the fowl.

My host and I sat at the back of the hut, whilst the man in front kept watch. Some flocks were continually passing, and we could hear them, but they were all by far too high to attempt decoying them, as they appeared to be *travellers*—*i.e.* they went in a straight line, without in the least deviating either one way or the other from their course, being evidently bound for some farther spot down the coast. But those flocks who come wavering and circling over the fens are those that are tired or hungry, and whose attention is evidently drawn to the marsh. Such flocks as these are those to whom the shooters devote their attention. Well, we had been waiting about half an hour when suddenly the man turned round, hit the dog on the nose with the back of his hand to stop his snoring, and laid hold of the drake.

"Look!" whispered my friend in my ear, nudging me forward.

I crawled towards the entrance and looked. The man was on his knees by my side, holding and stroking the drake, and looking up at a large company of ducks, about twenty in number, who were then about 200 yards high, and appeared undecided as to their next course of action. The man looked at them wistfully, and then popping his arm out quietly, he threw up the drake, who I fully expected would have flown to his mates and settled by

their side. But instead of doing that, the bird deliberately put on all steam, and up and up he went, actually circling near the strangers, whom he accompanied for some little distance, and then he wheeled back, round and round, and finally he came lower and lower, and flop! he came down near his ducks. He, however, did not stop with them, but swam at once towards the hut and waddled back to it, when the man putting his hand out took him up gently, and with the other hand offered him the box of oats wide open. Of course, he began digging into these with a will, and was thus brought back again into his basket, when the man took it up and retired with it to the back of the hut, whilst my host and I got ready in front. I had never seen that before, and the device, in troth, is exceedingly ingenious. Nothing, in fact, could be better devised to induce the wild-ducks to come down than to have thus one of their *confrères* to send to them, and offer them an invitation to come and be killed. The way these call-drakes are worked is wonderfully simple. The afternoon before they are to be used they are kept without food, and of course, when on the next morning they are thrown up, their first impulse is to go up to those ducks they happen to see on the wing, and then, as they are hungry, they come down again to the hut, where they know food is kept ready for them. Still, however simple it may be, it is very clever, and I was simply delighted beyond measure at this little performance.

Meanwhile, the wild birds, who had watched our drake's motions with very great earnestness, thought that he had pointed out to them a very fine piece of feeding-ground, and seeing, moreover, the three other ducks quietly feeding, diving, &c., on the open water, they made a preliminary circle or two and down they swept. Flop, flop, flop! they came heavily on the water. No sooner are they there than they begin pluming themselves, but my companion nudges me; the double 10-bore and his own gun are ready. "Br-r-r-r!" calls he out. Up start the ducks, and the treble detonation floors eight of them. My companion gets out to reload. That is one of the inconvenients of muzzle-loaders for that work, one has to get out and stand up to reload. Why these *hutiers* won't use breech-loaders I can't tell. The fact is, they are accustomed to their old implements and won't take to any other, however superior these may be in every respect to their own.

Well, whilst the dog was retrieving the dead ones and a wounded one, the reloading was done and the man resumed his place with the basket. Four teals were our next shot, and they came quite readily to the decoy. Scarcely had the friendly drake

reached them than they sided with him, and came down with him; but we had to wait until he was secured again and brought in before we fired. The dawn of day was then appearing; and though my host told me that up till nine or ten the decoy would answer, I thought I would rather wander about in the marsh, and we arranged that I should go, with the man as my guide, whilst he would remain at the hut until ten. We went a long way from the hut so as not to disturb its occupant, and then I began sport. The worst of it was I could not understand a single word of what my guide wished to tell me. He spoke some incomprehensible Dutch *patois*, and though he could see that I did not understand anything, he shouted all the more, hoping, no doubt, that the greater the noise would have been the more chances he would have had of instilling his ideas into my head. At last we came to a meadow, where the man had some snares set for snipe all along little trenches he had dug across the bog. One or two caught birds were still fluttering, and others were dead. He set about collecting his slain and resetting the loops, whilst I went on shooting. I had about half-a-dozen shots—two at teals, two in a flock of plovers, and one at a duck—when, my host appearing on the path, we went towards him and walked home.

Snow fell in the course of the afternoon, and the flocks assumed rather longer proportions. There was a long V, composed of gray geese, that measured certainly over 300 yards in length in each wing, and numberless ducks passed in countless files, making all haste, goodness only knows where to! What a sight to a shooter! At night the snow was a foot thick, and the sky, if anything, appeared blacker than ever. No moon and an intense cold. This put a stop to the snipe-snaring, but the hang-nets were stretched for plovers and lapwings, and a *bascule*-net was worked so successfully that the man caught over sixty birds at one single drop. Along the running streams, and these never freeze, we met with simply splendid sport. I have rarely, if ever, met with such a fine fen. You see the land is all but irreclaimable, at least unless fabulous sums were spent towards reclaiming it, owing to the ground in some parts being much below the level of the sea at high-tide, so that water will always ooze, even if the streams and canals were not there a necessity, in order to keep certain parts of the ground as tolerable meadows for cattle to pasture on in mild weather. As it is, I rather fancy a man who should systematically work the fens as decoys, and with other devices for catching fowl or shooting it, would make it pay well, besides the fun of the thing. Its present owner sends weekly to market, during the season, a cart-load of birds, and sometimes two or three

but he and his fen-man cannot do justice to the ground. It would require half-a-dozen clever fen-men to work it properly. Certainly, as regards shooting, a dozen men might sport over the ground and do so beneficially to one another. I have seen marshes in Belgium where the sport was very good, but not near so good as the fun to be had there. With a judicious occasional cutting in the canals' or streams' banks all the indifferent meadows could be flooded or moistened at will, so as to induce the fowl to stop and feed; and since these indifferent meadows are, for some reason or other, distasteful to cattle, they could be made to pay by their game. This is done in some few cases, but many more could be managed.

I was not present when the man caught his sixty odd lapwings with the drop-net, but on the strength of this catch I went with him the next day, hoping to see a similar catch performed.

Everyone knows, of course, how these *bascule*-nets are worked, but the amount of skill, patience, and tact required to work them successfully is hardly credible. I watched from a distant hiding-place with a glass, because there was no room for anyone but the netter at the net itself, and I was lost in amazement at the difficulties that beset the undertaking. The birds won't come, or they pass away out of reach. Sometimes they go to the net as straight as an arrow, making you feel that they are answering the calls, and will be indubitably caught, when lo! they give a turn of their wings, and the whole flock sweeps by, teasingly near, and yet too far off the meshes. There was just such a flock coming to the man's enthusiastic calls, when I fully expected to see some fun. Nearer and nearer they went; at last they swept right in front, when the net came down and secured only about fifteen. Quicker than I could write it these birds were secured and the net set up again, when the calling began anew. This time plovers came, and some actually flew right in. Only ten were caught, however. Still it must be a paying amusement, and the fun is not without its charm; nevertheless, I don't much fancy that sort of thing, because I think, rightly or wrongly, that birds ought to be fairly shot on the wing, and even punting and decoying, though very amusing occasionally just for a change, I think are too murderous devices to be strictly called sport.

Howbeit a shooter must know all these tricks, even if he does not strictly hold them very sportsmanlike, and in truth, reader, are they not very ingenious and very amusing?

I spent a week at the Dutch fen, and it was altogether such a pleasurable week as I am not likely to forget for many a long year to come.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PUNTING ON THE DUTCH COAST.

SEVERAL years have now elapsed since my first punting cruise along the Dutch coast took place, and I have since gone to much farther places, on sport intent; but the recollection of my first excursion to Holland is to me amongst the most delightful of my sporting remembrances. There was in this first visit a character of novelty which impressed it indelibly on my memory, and I always revert to it with feelings of pleasure not unmixed with regret, for I am sorry to say the novelty to me is now so considerably worn off, that the sport as a consequence has got shorn of a good deal of its charms. Say what we like, there is always in something new an irresistible attraction. Every new place and every new sport is invested with an amount of romance or interest which is, it must be acknowledged, occasionally quite unwarranted, and which certainly appears sometimes even inexplicable to a man who looks upon it *avec froideur*. Fortunately, there are but very few sportsmen who can look upon sport of any kind with that calm sort of indifference; as a rule our expectations string up our spirits to the utmost pitch, and where there is nothing particularly delightful yet do we find charms, so all is for the best, *dans le meilleur des mondes*. Now, for instance, as regards the Dutch coast I must acknowledge that were the coast deprived of its feathery customers, it would be the most desolate prospect one could very well pick out all the world over, and therefore I quite grant that to a man who has not a sporting turn of mind cruising there must be, indeed, a meaningless penance worthy of dons of the Inquisition. But notwithstanding its desolate aspect, the first sight of the land is hailed by gunners with delight. To them there is no disgusting mud, no fever-breeding waters, no barren desolation, no desert swamps, no ugly perspective; all these drawbacks are obliterated in their minds by the knowledge, or the hope, that there are fowl there, and in abundance too.

Well, at the time of that first excursion I am speaking of I was what is called in yachting circles a dare-devil of a fellow, who would indubitably, some day or other, get drowned in his mad sails up and down the river in all sorts of weather. I am happy to say those evil prognostications have not yet been fulfilled; I am still alive, and what is more I am in perfect health and spirits. I do not believe in taking too great care of oneself: roughing it, in more senses than one, hardens one's constitution, and if there be a blow over the water what of it? Is that a sufficient motive to closet oneself with several congenial spirits, and indulge in every luxury one can think of, or that one's money can procure? No, decidedly no. At least I don't see it in that light, and I have had as yet no cause to regret that opinion at least.

Somehow, there is in the idea of being in a yacht (in one's own yacht I mean), a feeling of comfortableness that one does not experience elsewhere under whatever circumstances. At any rate that feeling was in me so highly developed, and such was my love of the sport, that in the simplicity of my heart I would have liked to have made my yacht my bachelor home, and whenever affairs called me ashore I invariably left my boat and my guns with feelings very much akin to that of a lover when he parts, even temporarily, from his first sweetheart. (Mind, his *first*, I have said, for those who come after that first one don't enjoy half the privileges of their leader, and we all know what our feelings were for our first love.) Naturally, with such a fondness for boating and sporting, the thought came more than once into my head that it would be simply very delightful to devote one's existence to sailing, &c. &c., and other wild fancies; and a cousin of mine, just as *cracked* as I was, and who was always with me, suggested that: "Like two new floating Robinsons, we could very well sail about, fish and shoot all our lives through, and oh! how jolly it would be!" It makes me laugh now, when I recall all those vagaries on the *tapis* again; but truth compels me to say that, at the time, we seriously entertained these thoughts, and we gravely discussed their *pros* and *cons*, *avec un sérieux imperturbable*. Still, this passion for manly sports is rather to be encouraged in young folks; it keeps them out of mischief, and happy are they whose heart yearns for such innocent and exhilarating pastimes, and who have the means and the leisure for indulging in them!

Well, we had been about all the season, and we were rather tired of the river. When one sees, every second day or so, every creek, point, and reach on a river, one is apt to get sick of it; familiarity breeds contempt, and we had come to look upon Father Thames as upon a very *débonnair* king indeed. In fact

like young birds who had been trying their wings at short flights, we longed for something new; we wanted a long sail, but where to go and how to manage it was the question, for the boat I had then was too small for us to entertain the thought of going anywhere with it but upon the river. Well, autumn had passed away, winter had come in, and with it had come dreadfully cold weather. The latter, as a matter of course, filled the creeks and marshes with birds, and we began having fine sport. One morning, however, it being rather foggy, we had anchored close to a forty-ton yacht near Benfleet Reach, when, happening to look up, I recognised on board the other craft the face of a friend. He came over to us, and then it came out that he was bound to the coast of Holland, where immense flocks of birds were reported to have established their quarters. The yacht he was in belonged to a gentleman with whom I was well acquainted, who made it a rule to go over every winter for that sort of sport, and who therefore knew the pet places well. Unfortunately, two or three friends of his who intended joining in the cruise had been prevented from so doing, and a letter from them, which had reached him in Gravesend where he had been waiting for them, had informed him that, much to their sorrow, they found that they could not spare the time.

"You see," my friend went on, "we have three men and a boy aboard to manage the yacht; but, as regards shooting, we are only two shooters, the owner and I, and that makes us rather short-handed. Why don't you two come with us?"

Here was a chance for us. Thereupon the owner appeared on his deck, and hailed us to go aboard for lunch, which we did; and by the time luncheon had been discussed he had proposed to us to go on the trip with him, and of course we had accepted. We got all our guns and traps trans-boarded, and as the shrimping fleet from Gravesend was making its appearance I watched the boats, and selecting a man whom I could trust I hailed him, and got him to put his son on board my boat to take charge of her, and he agreed to take her back to her moorings, and look after her during my absence. This being settled, the fog having cleared and the wind and tide suiting us, we up with the sails, and set out on our cruise.

Mr. Elmore, the owner of the yacht, was a great man in shooting affairs, and his collection of implements of sport was quite complete and of the best sort. There were two white punts lashed on deck, and in the fore-cabin, along the cushions, were two breech-loading swivel-guns, an old muzzle-loading one, primitively on the flintlock system, but which had been converted into a per-

cussion-gun; and in our own saloon were half-a-dozen breech-loading shoulder-guns, highly suitable for wildfowl shooting, two long single 4-bores, two single 8-bores, and two double 10-bores. I had myself a Snider 4-bore, and a double 8-bore. My cousin had a single 8 and a double 10; whilst our mutual friend had brought none, relying on those of the owner.

There were lots of birds about as we passed the Nore light-ship, but not in flocks, and therefore not worth shooting at.

"We will have plenty of firing when we get to our journey's end," said Elmore, "I warrant you. So we had better not delay on our way here."

At 4 P.M. it began to get dark, but the wind being fair we held our course. We were just passing Margate when we turned in, and the next morning when I came on deck again nothing but water and sky were visible, owing to a thick fog enveloping the continental coast completely, but Elmore declared that we were within four miles of the coast, and twenty miles of Ostend, where he intended taking his pilot, as per agreement. After breakfast the fog cleared up somewhat, and the low Belgian coast appeared; behind us, on our starboard, the Dunkirk lighthouse was still flickering, and ahead of us the Nieuport lighthouse tower was getting visible with the glass, for the weather was not quite clear as yet. At twelve we passed Nieuport, and at 3 P.M. only, owing to the wind shifting its quarter, we were enabled to make the Belgian harbour. Our Dutch pilot was on the jetty watching for us, and he came aboard at once. He was a jolly-looking fellow was Karl, with his fur cap thrust down to his shoulders and his thick pea-jacket buttoned up to his ears.

To our owner's queries about birds he answered innumerable "Yahs!" So we concluded that sport was to be had. At dusk we left, just when the Dover steamer was coming in, and Karl began his arduous duties. We wanted to reach Flushing for the morning flights, the Escaut being, and justly so, reputed as one of the very best fowling spots on the continental shores.

Elmore, his friend, my cousin, and I, we all turned in early, the navigation being entrusted to the worthy Dutch pilot and the crew, who knew him of old, and had learned to appreciate him and to obey his orders with due promptness and attention. There are lots of sand-banks about there, and in truth, when I had been shown a chart of our whereabouts, setting forth the numberless sand-banks and their shallow soundings, the sight had made me shudder; it seemed such an inextricable maze of shallows and treacherous banks, that I wondered how a man could possibly undertake piloting a boat there with the self-evident confidence

exhibited by Karl. But Elmore said the fellow knew the place as well as his own home, and he had piloted his yacht up and down every season for the last fifteen or sixteen years, so every confidence could be placed in him.

At three o'clock A.M. we were called, and when I went on deck I found we were at anchor within a mile or so of a low shore, which, it turned out, was one of the banks of the Escaut. After a good breakfast the two punts were launched, and the swivel guns rigged out; then Elmore stepped into one of the punts, his friend into the other, and I got into the dingy with my cousin and a man to row us about, and we all made a start. The Escaut forms, with several other streams, a large estuary, where many large and small islands are dispersed here and there northward, some of these islands being large enough to contain large towns, and many hamlets and villages; others, on the contrary, being mere specks, with but few or no inhabitants, and little or no vegetation on them. In the river itself, owing to the traffic of steamers and sailing vessels, there is not much to be done in the way of fowling; but behind the islands, large and small, and keeping up northwards, the sport is unrivalled.

When we started it was yet two hours to daylight, but there was just sufficient light to enable us to see anything on the water up to sixty yards or so, and that was all. Our oarsman was a skilful adept in the fowling art, and we trusted him entirely as to the best course to pursue.

"Gentlemen," said he, as we went off, "my governor and his friend are a-going round the big island, and we had better not go too near them and disturb their birds: but I knows two or three little islands—good 'uns, mind!—higher up the estuary, and if I don't show you some birds behind the lee of them islands, then my name ain't Thomas!"

A row of a mile and a half, during most of which, to keep ourselves warm, for it was terribly cold work sitting there doing nothing, I took the bow oar, my cousin pulled stroke, and Thomas pulled two oars, so that we not only progressed quickly, but we kept our blood in circulation, and that was of still greater importance, for, when once the cold has insinuated itself through one's clothing there is no longer any fun in sporting; at least, that is my feeling in such cases. Well, half an hour's strong pulling against the tide brought us on to the leeward of the first small island, where a strip of sand had already got bare.

"If one of you gentlemen will land up here and stalk across, he will be about sure to have a shot on t'other side," said the man.

My cousin volunteered to do so, and he was accordingly landed;

then we went to the next island, a small one too, behind whose banks we saw a large company, quite out of the way of the Antwerp steamers and ships, quietly disporting themselves at the mouth of a creek. Whilst we were "working up" to them we heard a punt-gun fired towards Walcheren, and this we set down to be one of our friend's, as indeed it turned out to be. The distance, however, was so great that the birds before us took no notice of the noise beyond stopping their gambols for a few seconds, though I dare-say had another gun been fired just then, they would have taken to flight at once. As it was, after listening a few moments, they resumed their playful antics and we resumed our stalk. The space, however, in front of the creek was so open that I saw it would be impossible for me to get within shot, as the birds kept nearing the shore more and more. So I leant back to my oarsman, and when he had brought his ear close to my lips:

"Thomas," I whispered, "back water; land me against that strip of shingle behind us. I will go up towards the creek, then you row ahead and drift quietly against the birds: *that* will drive them to me, and I will nail a lot of them!"

He signed assent, and joining actions to signs he backed quietly and noiselessly; I got out and went down towards the creek, taking advantage of all the inequalities of the ground until I reached a bend of the creek, where I squatted in a hole just within five or six yards of the water. I had lost sight of the boat, but presently it turned up in sight a long way off—400 yards at least—and came towards me. I had placed my double 8-bore, loaded with No. 2 shot, across my knees, and was just cocking both barrels when a bunch of teal passed over my head and went down near the company.

The first birds, who had been disturbed by the new arrivals, soon recovered that shock to their system, but they looked at the advancing boat with suspicion, and what I had expected happened; for they paddled nearer and nearer to me as the boat got nearer and nearer to them. At last they were within eighty yards, and for fear of frightening them away by any sudden motion I had placed the gun so that the barrels were directed straight towards them, when suddenly I saw a flash on the opposite shore; it was a gun's, I knew at once, and so did the birds instinctively, for before I could even hear the report they jumped up startled, and having no option, I fired at once and killed three. Another bird who had been wounded attempted to follow the flight, but feeling his strength giving way he turned back towards shore, and was going away in first-rate style, I must say, when he all at once shut his wings and came down all of a lump into the creek, quite dead.

Thomas had pulled towards me, and he had already collected "the dead 'uns," as he called them. I called him up and he picked up the other one, after which I re-embarked and we went for my cousin, whom we found standing on the shore waiting for us. He had killed five birds in two shots, and he fired also at a flock of geese as we were going to him. The big guns had sounded several times, and Thomas opined that the swivels would not bring much less than a score of birds each. It was light then, and the fun in passing flocks was very great. I do not remember having ever seen such numbers of birds at the same time on the wing as we saw that morning. But what a queer country Holland appeared to me when at last the sun rose! Flat as can be, nothing to be seen for miles but swamps and banks and creeks, mud and water, water and mud, with here and there reeds, a house or two in the distance, and two score or more of windmills going on at the same time. The river traffic having begun in earnest, and being rather tired, cold, and hungry, we rowed back, or rather sailed back to the yacht, for the dingy was provided with a sail about the size of a large handkerchief, and when we got back our puntmen had returned, and the deck forward was literally covered with fowl. A Dutch boat came up to us about noon, and they purchased all our birds at about a shilling apiece on an average. There were two men in that boat, and they also had a swivel gun, rigged forward, and a couple of muskets in the stern. These fellows shoot, and buy from other shooters, and when they have a sufficient provision of birds they sail up the Escaut to the several villages on the banks, and even to Antwerp, when the wind, the tide, and the market suit them, and they make a very tidy living of it; but, by Jupiter! they must have *l'âme chevillée dans le corps* to stand such weather in an open boat, without even a board as a shelter, no fire, no cabin, no comforts. It made me shiver to see them. Yet they appeared very contented and well pleased with their lot. They were brothers, and Elmore had known them and trafficked with them for many years; as for Karl, he was a sworn friend of theirs, and in fact he had been the first to signal them and greet them on board. They had each a stiff glass of warm water (and sum'at mixed with it), and they pulled away hurrahing.

We stopped at anchor for the evening punting, when I, accompanied by Karl, went in Elmore's punt, and my cousin stepped in the other punt with Elmore's friend. Punting when two people are in a small craft is rather awkward, but then it is better to subject oneself to some inconvenience than go alone when one does not know the ground. It has happened that strangers have

lost themselves amongst the flats, and it has even happened that some native wildfowl shooters, who as a rule rarely quit their own well-known shooting cantons, have become entangled in the mazes of the marshes, and have become stranded in bitter cold weather, when it was a moot matter whether they would pass the night in peace and manage to escape scot-free. An old man who used to live at Middleburg, and who used to follow fishing in fine weather and shooting in winter time for a livelihood, became thus lost just a year before we were there. He was found dead in his punt, to all evidences, frozen to death. The punt had evidently become stranded, and the old man had tried to extricate it by going overboard and shoving the punt along, for his feet and trousers bore the unmistakable marks of the marsh mud ; but this only made matters worse, for his feet must have been benumbed whilst he was in the water, and then literally frozen when he came out of it. Besides, being an old man, he had not enough natural stamina and blood to stand such a state of things, and when he was discovered by some eel fishermen who were wandering over the flats, he had been dead several hours. Well, with such an instance on record, it was not very tempting to any stranger to those parts to launch out alone in all his glory. Hence my going away with Karl, who, being himself a proficient in fowling matters, was pretty sure to find some shots if any were to be had. It was dark at five and the moon was very faintly discernible at the horizon, but as it rose things took a livelier appearance. Yet nothing, I ween, is more gloomy and terrible to look upon than a vast expanse of water in the solemn silence of the night. Not that the silence was complete by any means, for I never heard so many cries of wildfowl as we did then, but this only made the silence more oppressive, and the gloom more wildly impressive. I was a young fowler then, and I remember well that I was awed in my corner forward, and the ripple, ripple of the little wavelets as they broke on the bows and sides of the slender punt inspired me with a morbid idea that we were not safe.

"Karl," I said presently, "I want to shift my quarters, for I am getting cramped."

"Well, do, meinherr," said he, "but be careful, for the punt is heavily loaded ; don't overbalance yourself."

The way I shifted after that, I warrant you, would have been a pleasant and suggestive subject of contemplation to anyone who should have been near enough to see me.

"There is nothing more to be guarded against," Karl went on, "than standing up in a flat-bottomed boat, for it will capsize so readily that too great a caution cannot be exercised. I went once

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with a gentleman in a punt of mine; it was cold, he drank a lot of neat brandy, got quarrelsome, and would stand up in spite of my warnings; so I had to floor him, and bind him hand and foot, to save his own life; then I took him ashore, and his friends gave me a sovereign for having done so."

Meanwhile, we had been quietly sailing round Walcheren (for the punt had a short mast and small sail), and when we rounded to the north side, Karl, who was peering into the darkness, touched me on the shoulder, and I looked ahead.

"What is the matter, Karl?" I whispered.

"Birds," he replied laconically, and stretching his long arm he brought down the sail, tripped the mast, took a scull and kept well in shore, whilst I got the swivel-gun's breech open, and shoved in a cartridge. Everybody knows how "working up" to a flock is managed, so on that point I shall not enter into unnecessary details, what is done once is done always; suffice it to say that we had two successful pitches, and between us we bagged about thirty birds.

Yet, good as these bags were they could not compare with those we subsequently made at Flackee, at the mouth of the river Maes, higher up still at the back of the island of Texel, and finally well down into the Zuyder Zee; and it would certainly be useless for me attempting to describe anything like the quantities of birds we saw. When I state that the sea was black with them for many miles, I think it will give some idea of the sport we enjoyed.

Unfortunately, my cousin caught a bad cold, and that put a damper on our spirits. For fear of anything bad coming from it I prevailed on him to go ashore, and I took him to Amsterdam, where he had proper treatment and advice. There is nothing more to be guarded against than colds caught on the flats, and to anyone who should ever feel their effects I will unhesitatingly say: "Go home at once and nurse your cold, or it may play you a bad trick." Well, my cousin remained a week in the capital, and joined us again on our return journey.

On the whole, we had extremely fair sport. The only bothers we had to put up with were, firstly, the sand-banks, to which we had to give a wide berth when we could, or to sail over cautiously when it was practicable to do so, and we could not do otherwise; secondly, the storms, however slight, which (in such an open and bare country as Holland is) have the effect of putting all the bays in such a turmoil that, with the slightest indication of a smart breeze, it is not safe to venture in the punts on gunning

expeditions. Barring these inconveniences, which are mostly inherent to all good wildfowl quarters, the Dutch coast is undoubtedly the finest field of action for those amateur puntmen who delight in finding out what foreign countries can offer them in the way of sport.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WILD-GOOSE SHOOTING IN HOLLAND.

Wild-goose shooting is conducted on a wholesale scale in Holland. Of course there are occasionally geese shot singly when met with accidentally; but these are exceptions. These birds are so wary that it is rather an uncommon occurrence to come upon one or two unaware of your presence. As to systematically stalking them, it is next to impossible, on account of the fields and pastures being separated by very large ditches, canals, or rivers. Some other means therefore had to be devised, and the plan hit upon was that of decoying the birds. No easy matter this, as the sequel will show, and not a very cheap arrangement either. However, nothing can be done with nothing, and as the proceeds of the spoils more than amply repay the shooters for their trouble and expenses, why, all is for the best.

The wild-geese, from some inscrutable motive best known to themselves, invariably visit the same pastures every season. You will find in a set of meadows, placed exactly in the same sheltered position, possessing nearly the same number of willow-trees and reeds, watered by the very same river or canal, that one has been chosen, and to this one year after year do the flocks repair, and under no consideration whatever will they condescend to visit any other. This peculiarity is duly taken advantage of by the *chasseurs*. In the summer they come into that particular meadow, and the field of action is prepared against the next season. I will proceed to describe as clearly as I possibly can the way in which matters are arranged and managed.

In the middle of the chosen meadow the professionals dig a hole large enough to admit of a distiller's vat being placed in it, half being below the surface of the ground, the other half above. To prevent the vat from being lifted from its place by the water which permeates through the ground, two long and strong beams

are placed across at the bottom of the hole, trenches being dug to admit of their insertion, and on these beams the vat is screwed. The earth that had been removed is then thrown back, and not only covers the beams, but is placed round the vat in such a way as to bring the ground gradually on a level with its top. The turf, which had been carefully cut with a spade, is then replaced over the earth so as to give it the appearance of not having been disturbed. The next thing then to be attended to is covering the top of the vat. This is done with a strong wooden cover, made to slide on and off at will, and on one side of this cover is fixed the half of a small barrel, large enough to admit of a man's head being easily and freely popped in and out. This small barrel is pierced with holes at the top and all round. It is through these holes that the watcher has to peep, to ascertain the movements of the birds before any steps can be taken by the shooters. This barrel is painted green, and the top of the vat is covered with turf, so that really the whole concern is not noticeable in the slightest degree unless your attention be particularly drawn to it. The next thing done is to dig a trench at a distance of some hundred or two hundred yards for the bird-thrower. This trench is made deep enough to conceal a man sitting in it, and half-a-dozen ganders in baskets. Moreover, in actual work the trench is hidden by a bush of evergreens or branches in full foliage. Everything being thus prepared, the apparatus is left alone until the season has set in and the birds have begun to flock. When the passage commences, about forty or fifty stuffed wild-geese are placed round about the vat, and a dozen or so of live ones are tethered to the ground with iron spikes and slender chains (they would nibble and cut through a cord, and if not tethered they would wander away). The tethers are fastened under and around their wings, and they are soon accustomed to the restraint. Each of them has a good handful of oats or some other grain thrown around it, so that they all set to pecking away in the grass. This, of course, inspires great confidence to the wild birds.

The decoys being thus prepared, the shooters get into their vat, the top of which they slide back over their heads, and one of them taking the post of watcher pops his head into the peeping-barrel. Meanwhile the bird-thrower, carrying along with him half-a-dozen ganders in baskets slung over his shoulders, gets into his trench, and there he also keeps a look-out.

Now the wild-geese arrive. Far away, up in the clouds, you can hear them screaming and trumpeting. They recognise from aloft their accustomed feeding pasture, and in it they see some of their own tribe already feeding. This sight makes their mouths

(or rather beaks) water, and they come down with a mighty rush. But they don't settle yet. Somehow, the old ones in the flock seem to think that there is something very queer about the feeding birds, and with a defiant and scared blast of screeches they sheer off. Then, and not until then, the bird-thrower takes very gently one of his male birds out of its basket, and throws it into the air. The bird flies up and up into the clouds, and, after taking a panoramic view from above, descends amongst the decoys, and fraternises with them as old companions.

Meanwhile the wild birds, who have been eyeing the whole performance, begin to think that their suspicions of something wrong were totally unfounded and uncalled for, and down they come, this time for good; and in two minutes the whole flock, numbering hundreds and sometimes thousands, is feeding among the decoys. The watcher then beckons to his companions, who noiselessly get ready. The men rise, the slide is quietly moved back, the guns are silently cocked, and when all is ship-shape and ready for action, one of the men rattles his wooden shoes against the sides of the vat, and the birds, startled, lift up their heads. Bang! bang! bang! Nine or ten birds or more are floored; the others rise. Guns, ready loaded and cocked, are discharged at them as long as they are within range. The bird-thrower, hidden in his trench, fires also then into the lot, and thirty, forty, and sometimes fifty birds have been known to fall to this fusillade. Usually twenty birds is the average for four shooters, with two or three guns each. Sometimes, though, only one or two geese are killed, and sometimes none at all. It depends entirely on the distance at which the birds had settled, and of their speed when started. The dead and wounded are then collected. After this operation the shooters resume their station, the bird-thrower returns to his hut, and there is now nothing to do but to wait for another flock coming over, when another gander is let off, and again entices the new comers, who only settle down to get peppered.

And so it goes on all day, as long as birds are passing. When all the ganders have been thrown, the thrower comes with some oats in his hands, and offers it to the birds. They come readily, and whilst gluttoning over this dainty, the man very gently puts his arm round and under each bird, and lifting it up bodily, reinstates it in its basket. Of course, they could be collared with far less ceremony and attention, but then these birds, if once they have been handled roughly, fight shy of being caught for the future, and give no end of trouble. So that gentleness of treatment is a *sine quâ non*, if you wish to be on terms of familiarity with them. The sport, in point of numbers, is a profitable one.

As many as 2000 wild-geese have been killed yearly by a set of decoy-men. It has need to pay well, for the expenses are great. None who have not tried it can picture to their minds the quantity of oats that a dozen geese will eat *per diem*. It is something incredible and astounding. To watch them feeding, you would almost imagine that, like camels, they must have seven stomachs, or else that they stow away the food by some process of legerdemain.

Wild-geese are not good eating, to my taste. Of course tastes differ, but I confess I should not fancy wild-goose as a *plat recherché*. Usually the breast alone is eaten, and indeed it is the only part of the bird that is capable of being masticated by ordinary grinders. The legs and wings would defy any teeth but those of a crocodile. I have several times set myself to the task, under circumstances especially favourable to its accomplishment, viz. when I have been ravenously hungry, and there has been nothing else to eat—but in vain; I have failed most ignominiously. The Dutch, however, manage to eat the birds *in toto*, and though I do not envy them their repast, I must admit that I admire their powers of mastication and digestion.

It is good fun shooting wild-geese; but beyond the pleasure they afford the sportsman they are good for nothing else, barring the use of their down for making pillows and feather-beds.

There is something very comical and droll about the position of the sportsman within his shooting vat. There you are, hidden in semi-darkness, knowing that birds are round you on all sides and sometimes actually walking over your head, their great splay feet occasionally obscuring your loopholes, making the air vocal all around you with a deafening cackle that grates upon your ears and sets your teeth on edge. The situation tickled me so much at first that it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could refrain from bursting into a roar of laughter, a *contretemps* which would, of course, have spoilt our game altogether. But the sport, I can assure you, is not without its excitement. When your watcher gives you the warning touch on your arm which is to bid you prepare for action, however well seasoned your nerves may be—however tough an old veteran in sport you may be—you will find your heart beat a little quicker, and your pulse throb a little faster, as you bring your gun up and peer through your loophole at the vast flock of wildfowl before you. And when the birds rise *en masse*, after the first discharge, I cannot describe the sensation which the whirr and whistle of those myriads of wings and the chorus of wild shrieks and screams from the terrified birds produce. It is a scene not to be forgotten, and for my own part I shall

always look back upon my first day's wild goose shooting in Holland as an epoch in my career as a sportsman, associated with feelings which I have never experienced in any other kind of sport.

The amount of shot which a wild goose will carry away without appearing any the worse for it, is a thing also that must be seen to be believed. The number of cripples that consequently escape is very great, and if one were allowed after the *feu d'enfer* to hunt up the marshes for the wounded birds, there would be some capital sport; but it must not be thought of for a moment, because the other decoy-men, as a matter of course, could not bag any birds if you kept on firing away in the marshes. Besides, no one seems to think it worth while to fire at a single bird. The decoy-men, when birds are round them, wait till a good number cluster together, and then blaze into the ruck; they would scorn to pick out a single bird. One may well picture, therefore, what their feelings would be if they saw their chances of another pot at a flock destroyed by an (to them) idiotic, sportsman, blazing at single birds among the marshes. It has sometimes happened that English sportsmen have adopted this plan, but it has invariably led to terrific rows. The Dutch are not so patient as we fondly imagine, and when they are roused their fury knows no bounds. A Dutch *huttier* would as soon kill a man who should persevere in thwarting his efforts, as he would fire into the "brown" of a flock of birds. No little caution therefore is necessary in dealing with these men, with whom wild-goose shooting is not a matter of sport, but of serious business. The best plan to pursue for a stranger who has no experience of Dutch shooting, is to secure the services of a good professional, and then put himself completely in that functionary's hands. He must, for the nonce, be content to sink his own individuality, and have no ideas of his own, but act solely in accordance with the suggestions of his guide. I followed this course, and I had no reason to regret it.

SHOOTING IN BAVARIA.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BATTUE AUX LOUPS IN BAVARIA.

It was during the severe winter of 1869 that I assisted at the affair. The battue had been announced by the communal *gardes* in their respective villages *à son de tambour*, and every man who owned a gun of some sort was getting it ready for the occasion. Those who had ammunition lent some to those who had none, so that, altogether, the day of battue promised, at least *de faire parler la poudre*, if no animal was made to bite the dust, or rather, I should say, the snow; for we were in the heart of winter, and for several weeks the white cloak had been thrown over the land, and it had, if anything, daily increased in thickness ever since it had appeared. In some of the villages the peasants had had to cut a path through the drifts from their doors to the road, if they wished to commune with their neighbours; and the prince's *garde*, at whose house in the woods I was then stopping, declared that the inn at the village was the only place whose entrance was plainly visible when one entered the burgh. His own domicile, though well surrounded by the forest trees, looked inexpressibly gloomy, and to all appearances seemed as if buried under an avalanche; but the old flat roof held well, and in spite of the violent gusts of wind which at times blew as if they meant to uproot it and carry it down bodily into the valley, where the torrent was roaring on its way to the Rhine, it remained snugly ensconced in its woody nook.

I was standing at the door smoking a pipe, and the evening shades were already streaming into the valley, when worthy Kasper, the guard, hove in sight at the bend of the path that led to the village. He, too, was smoking his pipe, his overcoat was buttoned up over his thick woollen scarf, and the flaps of his fur cap were

carefully drawn down and tied under his chin, so that he looked very cosy with his thick hob-nailed shooting boots and his long brown gaiters reaching up to his thighs. He had his gun *en bandoulière*, *i.e.* slung over his back, and, with his hands in his pockets, he appeared very satisfied with his own lot and wishing for nothing better.

I have often thought that the life of *gardes-forestiers* is not without its charms. True, these *gardes* live like wolves, being always more or less (but rather more) in the woods, but what then? They all have comfortable homes, comfortable clothes, and if their pay is rather small as compared with our own ideas of what a man's pay ought to be, why we ought to take into consideration that they have no unhealthy work to attend to; that their life in the open air possesses many potent charms; that, besides, their wants are few and not costly, and that in spite of the low tariff according to which their services are retributed, yet most of these men, if not all, not only manage to keep a wife in comfort, and to rear their children in health and to give them a little education in the bargain, but, moreover, they also manage to put money by. I should just like to see a British gamekeeper keeping a wife and children and saving money on £40 a year. Say what we like, the cheapness of living ought, after all, to be the criterion of sufficiency and suitability of pay. No man in England could do what the Bavarian keepers do, under, at least, 30s. a week, and then, far from saving anything, I wonder if they would have a penny to spare at the end of the year?

Kasper was one of the best specimens of continental keepers it has ever been my chance to meet. At the time I am speaking of he was about forty: he was a strictly honest, sober, but jovial man withal; he knew his place and other people's, and was certainly a most industrious keeper. It did not matter to him what the weather was like; every morning, long before dawn, he was gone on his rounds, and these kept him out the best part of the morning. These foresters, by the way, are not only *primâ-facie* game-keepers, but they are also *forest*-keepers, *i.e.* they look as keenly after the wood-gatherers, woodsmen, charcoal-burners, and forest-sawyers, as they would after a poacher, and it is astonishing what an amount of depredation the presence of a single *garde* living in the neighbourhood will prevent the villagers from even attempting to commit. In fact, everyone fears the *garde* as he would *le diable*; and well they may, for these *gardes* do not trifle in the performance of their duties.

Well, Kasper then was coming up, and I called out a greeting to him; when, touching his forehead:

"Good news," said he, "very good news, meinherr. The prince authorises a general *battue aux loups*, and I have just gone down to three villages that it may be known to the shooters. Now, we will see if we can't find out the marauders that have been looking about here lately."

The marauders he alluded to were two or three wolves who had occasionally paid us some visits in the course of the week, but always in the dead of the night, when, on hearing their howlings, we would quietly jump out of bed and try to find out their whereabouts, but after an unsuccessful shot at them they had made themselves scarce. Winter always brings such customers in the forests, and when they become rather obnoxious a general hunt is made for them; but at the same time, as the peasants, under the pretence of looking out for the wolves, kill a lot of hares, &c., the keepers generally accompany them, and keep thus a sort of supervision over their actions. This was a rather necessary arrangement, as I was enabled to perceive pretty clearly on the following day. Well, on the morrow, by ones and twos and threes, there flocked to the *garde's* house the most extraordinary mixture of men and dogs I ever did see. It was still dark, though daybreak was near at hand; and when I got down into the large room two tallow-candles were burning gloomily, and the stove was roaring itself red-hot, whilst the men were loudly talking, looking at their guns, discussing the merits or demerits of their respective dogs, and drinking the *coup du matin*. Kasper was there in his glory, and two of his brother *gardes*, who had also arrived, were arranging with him the plan of campaign. One knew a she-wolf and her *louveteaux* (young) at a place near the large pool; the other had seen a fox going to earth in a spinney, and many of the men had seen a company of four wolves wandering about. A sawyer rose and said that they had actually come to his shanty, and tried to get in by shoving their muzzles under the rickety door.

"A proof," he added, shrewdly enough, "that they are getting rather pressed by hunger."

Well, at last dawn of day appeared, the dogs were all secured by their respective masters, and we made a start. Whilst going down we met another contingent in the shape of three fellows, armed with muskets, who had come from a long distance for the sake of the fun.

After the usual greetings, one of them took Kasper aside and told him they had no ammunition, when he good-naturedly gave them half-a-dozen loads each.

The first place we tried was near the stream. I sat on the bridge, from whence I could watch a goodish length of the wood.

About a hundred yards from me, on my left, a sawyer squatted himself with his old musket across his knees; and on my right, at about the same distance, was a charcoal-burner of the name of Kratchen, with whom I had become acquainted some time before.

"Meinherr," he had said to me, when I had chosen my place, "you are about sure to have a shot. They always try for the bridge when hard pressed."

And that, of course, made me still more careful and attentive. At the end of a quarter of an hour I saw Kasper appearing at the corner of the covert. He lifted up his hand, and we held up ours to show where we were and that we were ready, when he went back again, and ten minutes after I heard a shot, then two more, whilst the baying of the hounds and the yelping of the curs told plainly that something was up. A moment after Kratchen started up to his feet and fired in the hollow road that led to me. I advanced a yard or two and peeped over the bank to see what he had been firing at. It was a half-grown wolf who, with his ears flat on his head and his tail between his legs, was coming towards me at full speed, and so blindly that he did not seem to see me. I therefore let him come, and when he was but a few yards off I rolled him over. Then, as he was struggling, I finished him off with a bullet in the head, and all was over.

I dragged him up the bank out of the way of others who might come on the same road; but in my hurry I neglected to reload, and to my consternation I perceived a roebuck standing under the first tree, in front of me, listening to the row inside the covert, and the fact dawned on my mind that my rifle was empty. I did curse my folly, and no mistake, but it was past mending. The moment I opened the breech, in order to extract the empty case, away bounded the buck; I shoved a new cartridge in in haste and fired, in spite of the distance, but that is all I ever saw of that buck.

Meanwhile a good deal of firing had been going on, and I plainly saw my neighbour on the left bagging two hares that came to sit in front of him, and hiding them under his long *blouse*. That is the way it is done in that part of the world. Several *coqs de bruyère* and half-a-dozen pheasants flew over my head, and a good many hares came out too in different places, but, being loaded with bullet, I did not fire. Some little time after the beaters appeared and the shooters turned up. Two foxes, two wolves (of which mine was one), and a badger that had been dug out, were the visible results of that first attempt; but almost every one of the peasants had grown wonderfully stout during his short stay in or about the covert. This, however, was overlooked by the keepers,

who always allow a little potting of hares to take place, provided it is not actually done before their eyes or carried on too far, when, of course, they would stop it; but their orders are to be not too strict under such circumstances, and Kasper explained to me that though he knew perfectly well what had been going on, and the men knew also that he was aware of it, it was tacitly understood that no notice would be taken of it by any of the officials present. The only thing that is never allowed is the killing of large game or of birds; as for hares, they are so numerous that a score or two can very well be spared once or twice a year.

Whilst we were looking over our spoils a sledge turned up, and two friends of the owner came to us. They had both their guns, and the *battue aux loups* were consequently transformed into a regular game battue as well. I sent a boy back to Kasper's house with orders to bring my double central fire and cartridge-bag, for Kasper had come to tell me that a lot of game was wanted at his master's; and, in fact, the two gentlemen had come purposely to tell him so and to join in the fray. Whilst the boy was on his errand we beat another good bit of covert, but I could not do anything with my rifle, meeting no large game; and I am afraid I got rather sour at the slowness of my messenger. At last, getting out of the covert at a corner, what should I see but the very boy actually showing the gun to some of his companions, and they trying all in their turn to open it, but in vain, when one actually placed it across his knee, and pulled it with all his might with both hands, thinking he would be successful in that way. They were so intent upon it that they never noticed any of us, and fearing lest they should smash the gun I fired off my rifle, when they turned quickly round, and the boy laying hold of the gun ran hurriedly to me.

"We tried all we could to get it open," he said to me with astounding simplicity, "but we could not. How do you manage it?"

"Mind your own business," I said; "and look here, I would have given you a thaler had you been diligent, but since you have been humbugging about so, I will only give you some coppers. Now take this rifle and carry it on your shoulder, do you hear? Don't play with it, and keep within call of me if you can."

"Yah!" he said.

But he did not do it, the young devil. The next sight I got of him he was half a mile from me, going towards the sledge down the valley, with the rifle held horizontally over his shoulder, and about four or five hares and several birds hanging over the barrel as from a game-stick.

He was too far for me to draw his attention, so I let him go; but I solemnly promised myself to blow him up well after the day's sport was over, which promise, by-the-way, I was unable to fulfil, as I did not see him any more after that.

Well, the next wood was situated a mile and a half from the first, and as it covered pretty nearly one hundred acres of ground, and it contained very rough parts, it rather taxed our resources to get it fairly beaten and well guarded. The men were, as before, authorised to shoot vermin, *i.e.* wolves, foxes, stoats, weasels, badgers, &c., but all large game and the feathered tribe were exclusively to be left alone by them for us—that is, myself and the two Bavarian gentlemen (or rather noblemen, one being a baron and his companion a count).

I was offered my choice to go in or stay outside: I chose the first, and went accompanied by Kasper. The latter's dogs were rambling about like so many demons, and it was not long ere they gave us some work to attend to; a *coq de bruyère* was my first shot, and as it rose within ten yards, it was no great performance in me to knock it over. Kasper bundled two hares almost simultaneously, whilst a little lower down a boar made his appearance, but as he was completely surrounded by dogs, no one thought fit to risk it and fire until he came to a standstill, and got himself rid of the greatest mass of his companions, when he charged through them, tore one dog's chest right open, sent another flying with two or three ribs smashed, and upsetting four or five more, he made a decided bolt. Whilst this was going on, "Wolf! Wolf!" was shouted on all sides, and bang! bang! boom! bang! crack! went several guns and rifles in quick succession, a bullet actually breaking a twig within five yards of my nose. Evidently the wolf or wolves were coming our way then. Kasper stepped behind a large tree, and signed to me to do the same, as though he saw something. We were thus quiet for a few seconds when he suddenly popped out, shouldered his gun, and fired. I got out, and then saw a wolf, with his shoulder dislocated, struggling on the ground and dyeing the snow with his blood. Then an enormous bulldog, belonging to a butcher of the village, pounced upon him, a lot more dogs joined in the issue and soon all was over. Outside, the baron and the count were doing splendidly, and when we reached them the ground round them was strewn with birds and hares. They had also shot a roedeer and wounded the first boar, at least they said so; but if so, as they were firing with shot they did not hurt him much, for shot, however large, unless you are very close indeed to a wild-boar, does not make much impression on his vital powers. At any rate, we did not

see that boar any more, although another was subsequently shot by the baron, and that was very cleverly done. It seemed that it had been fired at and wounded under covert, but its wounds being slight had only had the effect of increasing its naturally not over-sweet temper, so that he broke covert and charged at the line of sportsmen, who were standing out, as only an enraged wild-boar will charge. I saw the whole trick perfectly, and I must say it was well done. The boar went so evidently straight to the baron, that by mutual consent and common courtesy it was tacitly owned that he ought to have it all to himself, and so no one else fired, but all looked on with great interest to see how the thing would go off. The baron jocosely remarked to us that the black fellow (*la bête noire*, as wild-boars are called) meant murder, but he would take care he did not murder *him*, when the boar, snorting, lowered his head, and came at him full tilt. When he was but within an incredibly short distance, so much so that I thought the gun had missed fire and an accident was inevitable, the shooter pressed trigger and coolly jumped aside, whilst the boar, carried on by its own impetus, actually rolled down to the very spot where the baron had been standing, quite dead, and with a hole the size of my fist in front of his left shoulder. That was very cleverly done and no mistake. But had the gun missed fire, or had the aim been at all wrong, it would have been long odds on the boar killing, or at least maiming the shooter for life. All those present clapped their hands. I said "Bravo!" and certainly the deed, though rather foolhardy, deserved its plaudits.

Now I hold these battues rather amusing, but you have to take a good deal of trouble notwithstanding that the beaters are supposed to do all that is needed. You must, if you are outside, always listen, and run to those places where you may be led to expect, by the voice of the hounds or the cries of the men, that some quarry will break covert. Of course, when small woods are beaten no such trouble is needed, because the shooters generally are numerous enough to surround the wood, or at least to occupy round it all the most likely places to get a shot at. But for large coverts a *corps d'armée* would be required to watch the outside thoroughly well; and as no *corps d'armée* is either available or desirable, the shooters have to exert themselves to the utmost and to multiply themselves, so to speak, by the said exertions.

There is, moreover, a good point in connection with that sport in Bavaria, and that is the *ferœ naturæ* are thoroughly what they ought to be, *i.e.* wild. And on the other hand the diversity of

game to be found there makes the sport extremely interesting; for whereas in the north of Prussia, Belgium, or France, whenever the hounds open the chances are a million to one that they are leading a hare and nothing but a hare, in Bavaria, Hesse Darmstadt, Luxembourg, Bohemia, Austria, Alsace, Lorraine, south of Belgium, south of Prussia, and east of France, under the same circumstances, you really cannot tell what to expect. The neighbourhood of the great Russian, Polish, German, and French forests continually supplies these places with game when that which they contained has been disposed of, and there is no limit to the supply when the weather gets very cold. Kasper told me that troops of wolves have frequently come not only to his place, but actually into the village during severe winter weather, and he himself had shot half-a-dozen foreign boars of a morning on their passage to warmer and more suitable climes. Besides the weather and the seasons, there are many causes inducing the big game to journey about. Some leave their fastnesses because they are too much hunted there; others get too numerous and disagree with one another, when the strongest drive the weakest to the wall, *i.e.* abroad; finally, the great cause of emigration is love, many heads of large game going over from Central Europe merely to find congenial souls in the neighbouring countries, and so it comes to pass that good forests and woods are never quite empty. Again, as regards the feathered tribe, there is always a good stock of birds in the forests; because, however well organised a battue (or a series of battues) may be, it is impossible to destroy more than a very small percentage of the birds, owing, firstly, to the extent of many of the coverts, and secondly, to the almost impenetrable parts which are to be found in each covert, and which afford a safe shelter to the birds under any circumstances. Poachers rarely do much in those places, precisely on that account, and as it is hardly worth while for these men to run the risk of being caught and sent to prison for a bird or two, the consequence is they leave the undertaking alone and give it up as a bad job, as soon as ever they have tried it and found out the uselessness of the attempt. On the other hand, keepering is not neglected, all the same; but night-watching, as we understand it, and as it is carried out regularly on most manors in England, is never resorted to except under very peculiar circumstances, such as the one I am going to relate. I must, however, first end my narrative of the *battue aux loups*, by stating that the sledge went back that evening loaded with two wild-boars, three roedeer, scores of hares and birds, and the baron and his friend had to hire another conveyance for themselves at the village. Of wolves, seven were shot that day,

and two which had been severely hit were shot the next day, one by Kasper, the other by a neighbouring keeper.

As for the boy to whom I had confided my rifle, he had taken it back to Kasper's house and then he had joined a group of men who were on their way home. Whilst crossing a spinney one of the men shot a fox, and the boy volunteering to carry it, picked it up with more zeal than discretion, for it turned out subsequently that the fox had been either only stunned or else it all through played "*coon*." Howbeit, it allowed itself to be carried quietly enough a goodish way. The youth had tied its hind-legs together and hung it over a stick, and there it was, swinging to and fro at every one of the young lout's motions, when suddenly it took it into its head that it had had enough of that carrying process, and to the terror of the boy and the unbounded merriment of his companions, it laid hold of the boy's fattest portion of the thigh with its teeth, and the way the boy danced and howled for relief was a great treat to the bystanders, who could not make out at first what the row was about.

"Oh, oh, oh!" went the boy, springing up at every shout for each bite, and he dropped fox and stick. Then the state of the case became apparent as the fox tried to bolt, but as its hind-legs were securely tied together it could not do so, and the dogs were allowed to worry and kill it right out that time.

When Kasper related it all to me he fairly yelled for joy, for he was there at the time accompanying the men for a parting glass at the inn.

"I wish you had been there," he said. And I wished I had.

Now I come to this night-watching adventure I have hinted at a few moments ago.

About four or five days after the grand battue had taken place, Kasper, who had gone to the village, came back looking very *soucieux*.

"What is the matter? You don't look yourself?" I inquired.

"Things are not going on as I would wish," he said. "There is a band of gipsies in the village; they have got lurchers, bull-dogs, and three tame bears; but they do no work, they don't show their animals, yet they live well and have plenty of money. With that I have nothing to do, but Yans, the butcher, told me that the other morning when he was going to his *abattoir* outside the village he met three or four of them with guns and dogs, and two of them were carrying a stag or a roebuck on a pole. Now, that is where the money and good living comes from, and it requires investigating, meinherr, it does indeed; and I mean to——"

"What will you do then?"

"Go down to the village and watch their goings on, and if one of them comes on our ground," he added, tapping the stock of his gun, "I will send him a gentle reminder, as true as my name is Kasper."

Well, in the afternoon we went down together, and when we arrived at the inn we found the innkeeper in hot controversy with two of the gipsies, evidently the leaders of the troop.

The innkeeper was saying: "I don't believe you do want my yard for your show of fighting bears and dogs. I don't believe you mean to have a show at all, there! You have been haggling about it for a week now, and you know my terms are lower than they have ever been for anyone else. You are merely pretending."

Thereupon, Kasper, who could contain himself no longer, walked up to one of the men, and putting his fist under his nose:

"It is not for your show that you are here, I know," said he furiously; "but let me catch you, you black devil, on my ground, and I will exterminate you and all your band!"

The man stepped back and took out a long knife, but Kasper cocked up his gun, and perceiving that the row was likely to end in bloodshed, both the innkeeper, myself, and several other persons who were drinking round the stove, interposed, and the two gipsies left scowling. When evening drew near, Kasper, without saying a word, disappeared, much to our uneasiness, and we sat on till about eleven o'clock, when the police came in their usual rounds, and the place was to be evacuated, as is usual at that hour in all the villages. I was just having a parting glass with the landlord when in tottered Kasper with his head and face covered with blood, and carrying his gun in two pieces, it being smashed at the trigger.

"I have settled them," said he, very quietly, and of course we closed around him to know the particulars.

"First of all," said he, "I must pick out the shot. They fired at me," he went on, and as he took off his leggings and pulled up his trousers, he exhibited his legs, which were, from the knee downwards, covered with blood. "It is nothing very serious," he replied to our inquiries, "but it lamed me for awhile. I have been over three hours coming these two miles!"

"And the gipsies?" we asked.

"I shot at the one who fired at me," he resumed, "and I smashed my gun on the head of another who hit me on the head before I could reload; then I had to beat a retreat, they were too many against me. Now, if anyone will assist me, we will go to their camp and get the lot locked up."

We all went, the police taking the lead, but no signs of the gipsies were to be found, their camp was completely deserted, and had been so for some two or three hours. The fugitives were pursued, but in vain, their traces being lost at the river, where they had embarked wholesale in the old cattle fording punt and had allowed themselves to drift, goodness only knew where to. So they escaped, the bad weather preventing further pursuit in the neighbouring State. As for Kasper, he was made chief *garde* for his conduct, and richly did he deserve the post, as a reward for his courage and pluck.

ANGLING AND SHRIMPING.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEA-FISHING—A DAY'S SHRIMPING ALONG THE BELGIAN COAST.

THERE have appeared at sundry dates several articles in sundry periodicals drawing readers' attention to the fact that shrimping might be made a very profitable undertaking. To this I can personally testify, not that I was interested pecuniarily in the profits of the expedition I am going to relate, but I took care to ascertain the value of our cargo, and I also took such an ample share in the fun of the proceedings, that I cannot revert to my day's shrimping along the Belgian coast without a feeling of pleasure, and I may add also of regret. At any rate, I will take good care to renew my acquaintance with the fun at the very first opportunity that will present itself.

I must, however, premise that my ideas of shrimping as a pleasurable pastime differ widely from those of our contemporaries' correspondents, as, for the life of me, I cannot see any entertainment in paddling about either on the sands or among the shallow rocks, and there getting the soles of my feet blistered or my shins abrased, as the case may be. That sort of thing is very entertaining to children, no doubt; at least, when I was a boy I used to like it immensely, but now it would be, I imagine, somewhat out of place. Besides, shrimping it on foot, though amusing enough for half an hour or so, would, if prolonged any further, become an unmitigated bore: it is, withal, I fancy, terribly hard work. Then, again, how about coming home? Is one to trudge along with his load of shrimps and his net just like the professional shrimpers after their tide's work? If so, I rather think it would be too much of a joke.

No. My idea of shrimping, associated with pleasurable fun,

must be carried on from a boat; if decked so much the better, as a cabin comes mighty handy to cook food in or to rest, and warm or cool oneself after the outside work.

Well, it was last year, during the month of August, that I went on that memorable expedition. I had gone before on several short trips with some of the Ostend boatmen, but these excursions had always somehow proved unsatisfactory. Not that the catches were bad—on that sandy coast they are always good—but the Ostend boatmen evinced invariably such an incredible amount of the happy-go-lucky style that I was fain several times to remonstrate with them in strong terms against their laziness. It is, no doubt, on account of the peculiar rig of their boats, whose only sail requires to be dipped for every tack, that these men invariably keep on a tack till they have run as far out to sea, or along shore, as they intend going, and then turning about, they come back over their track with an indescribable tameness that makes sailing with them a positively dreary entertainment. Neither will they allow you willingly to manage their boats. They think that none but themselves are capable of taking care of their nutshells; and it used to make me smile to hear them vaunting their own extraordinary capabilities as sailors, and depreciating in contemptuous terms the skill of men belonging to any other nation under the sun. What queer things national prejudices are! Whenever I wanted to rile one of these fellows, I had but to tell him that an English boy apprenticed but a couple of months to a Thames or Mersey waterman, would show them any day and at any time tricks that they never dreamed of in their philosophy, in the way of spinning a boat along, and twisting its way with it anywhere and everywhere. This invariably made them awfully savage.

Well, after having tried several of these excursions with success in point of shrimps, but with dreariness in point of fun, I had given up all hopes of having a real good day at sea, when, whilst I was on the west pier, a fifteen-ton yacht, flying British colours, came into harbour one fine morning in the beginning of August. Now, the entrance to the Ostend harbour is very narrow, as everyone who has been there knows; and anybody but a myope may, from either pier, not only see, but distinctly recognise, anyone he may know who may be on board the craft leaving or entering the harbour. And so it turned out that as the yacht sailed in, and I, with a lot more visitors, was leaning over the sides of the jetty, watching the fishermen and boats, my attention was drawn to the handsome fifteen-tonner, with her smart crew of Corinthians, who, with true youthful scorn of propriety and contempt for established usages, had turned up on deck in their shirt-sleeves, but with their

eye-glasses carefully adjusted, and were scanning the countenances of people on the pier. I did not know the two who were on deck, but the one at the tiller was an old friend of mine, whose attention I forthwith attracted by saying aloud in Cockney fashion :

"I will have your monocle !"

"Well, if this is not cool !" he growled portentously, as he turned round.

Then he caught sight of me, and his frowns vanished to make room for a broad grin ; for many a bit of fun had we two had together in years gone by.

Then, putting up his helm he drew closer to the pier, and whilst I kept pace with them we exchanged news, until I reached the first flight of stairs, when I got a boat and went on board. We dropped anchor past the mail steamer's landing-pier, and then we all went ashore, leaving the boy in charge. We had a glorious dinner at the Hôtel de la Plage ; and whilst smoking a cigar *al fresco* after our meal, we saw a small yacht, painted white, slowly hugging the shore.

"That fellow is trawling," said one of my companions, after a minute's survey.

"Shrimping, you mean," I replied ; "the water is too shallow where he is for trawling."

"Who is he ?"

"Don't know ; he is a gentleman, that is all I can say ; and he goes out shrimping every day as regularly as the professional fishermen."

"Then," said my friend, "depend upon it, my boys, there is fun to be had, and I vote we 'go in' for a day's shrimping too—what say you ?"

Of course the proposal was greeted with acquiescence on all sides ; and now we had to devise the ways and means.

"You see," said our owner, "I don't know this blessed shallow coast at all, and it is the rummiest spot, according to the *on-dits*, on the face of the chart. At a certain place you will find that a thirty-fathom lead hardly gets home, whilst a hundred yards farther you may get out of your boat and stand on the sands, with the water only coming up to your armpits may be ; and therefore I should not like to venture my boat along here, unless I had someone with us well acquainted with the part. And then, another thing, I have no shrimp-net, and our trawl, of course, would not do."

"We can very easily remedy all that," I said ; "we can hire a professional fisherman, together with his net."

"Well, we will see about this at once."

We rose and left with that end in view; but *l'homme propose* and *Dieu dispose.*

When we got near the harbour there happened to blow such a racing-like breeze that we unanimously thought what a glorious spin we might have ere night set in; and, without troubling our heads any further, we hailed the boy, got aboard, and, setting sail, we flew out to sea, where we remained till one or two o'clock in the morning; in fact, day was breaking when we re-entered the harbour. I need not say that we were so fairly knocked up that there was not even a hint given about shrimping, for that day at least.

However, in the course of the afternoon we made our arrangements quite satisfactorily. The man we hired rigged his net on board, and told us that if we wished to have some amusement we ought to start at 1 A.M., as he intended taking us past a village called Ostdunkerque, or some such name (and that was something like fifteen miles from Ostend), before casting his net, as he knew the place to afford a splendid stock of shrimps. We agreed to follow the man's sensible advice; I slept on board, so as to be ready, and by one o'clock A.M. we were under sail, gliding slowly out of harbour.

The night was wonderfully quiet and very beautiful, and how solemn is the sea in those dark hours of the night! The waters look black and terrible in their quiet motion; they seem then more awful perhaps, than when lashed into foam by a storm. The harbour was covered with phosphorescent globules, making it look as though covered with a sheet of fire; but outside, past the piers, the phenomenon ceased. There was a soft westerly wind blowing, which at first necessitated numberless tacks; it, however, altered somewhat within half an hour or so, and this materially lessened our labour, and gave us both time and leisure to look round about and enjoy the scenery. We were sailing along the coast within, I should say, a mile or a mile and a half of the shore, and the trip was indeed enjoyable.

We soon came up with the Ostend open fishing-boats, on their way, too, to the rich fishing-ground, so that we looked altogether business-like in our numbers. Day broke at two or a little after, when we were about half-way between Ostend and Nieuport-les-bains. First, a pale tint of blue invaded half the sky, making the other half behind us appear still darker. Then the blue changed into green, the moon turned of a dull, dirty yellow, and the stars disappeared; then a yellow streak coloured the horizon, this in its turn turned to rose, and finally half-a-dozen rays flashed up from behind the town, and the sun rose like a ball of fire. Then, all

along the shore, we could discern the downs and the church steeples beyond the downs, indicating where the several villages were situated.

We soon passed Nieuport, which, judging from appearances, was still wrapped up in its slumbers, and not a single soul was visible either on the pier, on the beach, or in the town.

My companions, now that it was all plain sailing, had turned into their berths once more, but I enjoyed the treat too much to follow their example; and, stretched at full length over two or three cushions spread on the deck, I remained, watching the coast as we went along. Past Nieuport was a perfect wilderness of sand and downs.

"There is the church of Ostdunkerque," said our Belgian pilot, pointing with his finger to a steeple in the distance.

I had the glass on at once, but could only see the tin weathercock of the edifice. The downs were so high that not one house of the village could be seen. Half an hour more sailing, and we began to meet fishing-boats on their return journey, with their nets out, and the men smoking their pipes and enjoying their *dolce far niente*. We went on a couple of miles farther, when I called my companions, who turned up, one after the other, yawning and stretching their limbs. We turned the boat about, got the net ready, and then overboard it was cast. We then sat down to a steaming-hot breakfast, which did not in the least lessen the pleasure of our undertaking. At the end of twenty minutes or so the net was hauled up, and never shall I forget the sight. We had four large baskets full of all sorts of rubbish, as well as shrimps, crabs, flounders, &c., and other small fry. As soon as the net was emptied it was turned out again and cast once more, whilst everyone of us began picking up the contents of the basket allotted to his share. Over the side went all the small fish, small shrimps, the crabs, and other rubbish, and finally the four baskets of mixture were duly reduced to one basketful of beautiful marketable shrimps, all alive, oh! and kicking too with a vengeance, as numbers of them occasionally kicked themselves out of their prison.

Before we reached Mariakerque, on our way back, we had six baskets quite full, and still more came. Neither was it an extraordinary catch, our man said.

"Every fisherman here might do the same," he said, "only they are too lazy. The moment they have caught enough for their day's living they sail back to port, and then get into a gin-and-beer shop, where they remain all day, as long as their money lasts, smoking, drinking, swearing, and fighting."

I can personally vouch for the truth of this last part of the man's assertion, as I have daily seen such instances of reckless squandering perpetrated by men who literally live from hand to mouth, and who, therefore, might be thought to have had more sense instilled into them by hard necessity.

Well, I was rather curious to ascertain how much £ s. d. our catch was worth, and as it had been arranged that all that we should catch should belong entirely to our pilot as a remuneration for his services and the use of his net, I asked him how he was going to sell it?

"To the shrimp buyers in Ostend," said he; "that is, if the market is not glutted already, in which case I will forward the lot to a Brussels salesman at the *marché au poisson*."

This, indeed, turned out to be the case. The numbers of boats that had been induced by the fine weather to go out had been large, and the consequence was that shrimps were a drug in Ostend for the time being.

But no time was lost. Scarcely had we anchored than our man set about his task, and within a quarter of an hour our cargo was transferred to the railway station, and there placed safely in a *wagon de marée* consigned to a salesman.

Three days later our late pilot showed me the bill. The whole batch had fetched at the hammer forty-three francs. The net profits to the man were about thirty-five francs, or £1 8*s*.

Now I do not call this a bad day's pleasure, nor a bad day's work, for the matter of that.

Why, therefore, should not some of our enthusiastic Corinthians make shrimping a part of their programme? The shrimping would cover every expense incurred, and buy new sails, new rigging, and a new boat, too, when necessary. There are many gentlemen who have not money enough to keep up an establishment on the standing which their position should require, at least at home, who might, by shifting their place of abode, indulge in the wholesome pleasure of yachting, and join to it the profitable undertakings of shrimping or trawling, with such sterling results as to place them at least on a standing of equality with those who have a fair income coming in regularly, independently from their own exertions.

I know the idea may be ridiculed by some; but let them sneer. I think it is far better for a poor gentleman to work for his living than to remain an idle loafer at home, a curse and a bane to everyone he comes in contact with; and I say emphatically (neither am I, by far, alone in my way of thinking) that a man who works, no matter for what reason, is a man who deserves respect from everybody, more so from loafers than from anyone else, and as to

the odium attached to manual work, it is just so much bosh and nonsense. There would be no more manual work performed by a Corinthian crew when shrimping than they would otherwise cheerily perform if merely sailing. Then why disdain the profits brought in by fishing?

Some gentlemen I know carry on the undertaking with such success that their boats, gear, and pleasure, not only do not cost them anything, but bring in, moreover, a very fair income, certainly not to be despised, considering how easily and pleasantly it is got in.

SEA-FISHING EXCURSIONS.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SEASIDE AMUSEMENT.

The subjoined leader appeared in *Bell's Life*, when about ten of the following Sea-fishing Excursions had been published in the paper :

"The papers of 'Wildfowler' on sea-fishing, which have recently been appearing in *Bell's Life*, must have been a kind of revelation to many a jaded holiday-maker at seaside resorts. That, in those abodes of aquatic pretence, dulness, and the *dolce far niente*, so much relish of the saltness of the sea, so much sport, so much hard work combined with hard play can be attained, must be indeed to most people very strange news. The adult male, if he has anything of the healthy Englishman in him, is badly treated during his annual visit to the sea. When the first delight of smelling the sea-weed (and the drains) is over, and the first day of delicious idleness on the sands is succeeded by a desire for a little fillip to the intellectual and physical man, what is this adult to do with himself? In too many cases, a lounge on the sands in the morning, the billiard-room in the afternoon, and the pier band, round which Whitechapel apes Hyde Park, in the evening, complete the round of seaside amusements. A man cannot dig sand castles with his little girls ; he cannot bathe all day ; he cannot take any interest in drives to a neighbouring village where there is nothing to see but a tea-garden *in extremis* ; he cannot for ever look through his five-shilling telescope at nothing in particular ; he *can* over-eat himself, and does. The probability is that, in the event, the digestive organs of a man suffer more from one month of healthy action at the seaside than

they do from many months of languid action in town. A tremendous appetite must be correlated to plenty of exercise, or the appetite is better absent. And the pity of it is that exercise of the kind an Englishman loves most—exercise, that is, sauced with a pinch of sport in it—surrounded, too, with novel excitements, is there in plenty, ready to the holiday-maker's hand, if he had only somebody to help him to it.

"'You may see,' said Pericles, the Prince of Tyre, to the fishermen, 'the sea hath cast me on your coast.' 'What a drunken knave was the sea to cast thee in *our* way,' was the polite response. It is in this mental attitude that the average fisherman of the average watering-place welcomes a stranger who would gladly be an excellent customer to him. The fisherman will take you for a row in his boat, and will even adjourn to the public with your shilling in his hand without doing anything at all to earn it; but at the first mention of genuine sea-fishing by an amateur the professional 'shuts up,' and becomes grumpy, suspicious, and almost jealous. Now, the fresh-water Thames fisherman, whatever be his faults—and he has some—is honestly anxious to show sport; and if he keeps 'in his mind deep reposed' one or two swims so good that he cannot bear to part with the knowledge to a casual employer, still he is rather fussy than otherwise about the merits of his second-best places. In nine cases out of ten, however, the sea-fisherman, if we may judge from his gruff and reticent manner, and the difficulty of stirring him, absolutely dislikes the notion of any amateur catching a single fish out of *his* preserve, the ocean. Perhaps the reason of this esoteric feeling may be traced to the fact that the fisherman cannot bear his occupation—really full of hardship and peril—being desecrated by being turned into a holiday pastime. He wishes that a glamour of mystery and awe (conducive to invitations to health-drinking) may surround the sea and its toilers. He is anxious to impress the tourist with a notion that his life is *not*—as it sometimes appears to be—'all beer and skittles.'

"Writers on fresh-water angling nearly always ignore sea-fishing, or pass it by with a contemptuous recognition. And yet we never knew anybody who had a good day off a bank populous with fish, and escaped sea-sickness, who did not enjoy himself most thoroughly. The great charm of sea-fishing is the promise or the reality of being surprised. One never knows what may come up at the end of a long sea-line. One's catch may range from an impudent crab to a wandering ground-shark. The hot toil of hauling in a line laden with puny candidates for martyrdom may at any moment be relieved by the appearance of a monstrosity of the

deep; and, if disposed to canine Latinity, the sea-fisherman may assume to himself the proud motto, *Dum perspiro, spero.* It is said that there is no art in sea-fishing. We partly grant the truth of the objection, but not its validity. Nor is there much art in live-baiting for pike, nor in worm-fishing for perch. There are good, simple folks, among whom that accomplished Cockney, old Salter, may be reckoned, who consider the setting of night-lines for eels an excellent and soul-inspiring sport. Our advice then to the sea-side visitor who would enjoy his holiday, put his health on a firm basis, and conquer a tendency to grow whitey-green at the motion of a boat, is to despise the sneers of those who can see nothing in any fishing that is not fly-fishing or spinning, to read the papers of 'Wildfowler,' and then to dig for himself with all convenient speed a bucketful of sand-lugs."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE THAMES ESTUARY.

Heigho! The wildfowl guns are now oiled for rest, and are cosy in their cases, and so, perforce, a wildfowler must turn his hand to some other pursuit, whilst his birds are breeding.

Now sea-fishing is just the sort of sport that suits men whose tendencies are towards wildfowl, for, whilst knocking about in search of new fishing-grounds, whilst sailing about the estuaries, and even whilst actually engaged in fishing, the wildfowler is still within the domains of his favourite birds; and if he cannot as yet hear and see the flocks, he, at any rate, will occasionally spy one or two "parents," breeding at home, in spite of all hints to the contrary, and even *that*, I contend, is something. There is something highly attractive in the fact of your being able, now and again, to see, whilst comfortably seated in your boat, how your birds are faring during their breeding season. As for me, whenever a "breeder" turns up, I follow it by sight as far as eyes can reach, and then heave an involuntary sigh, and wonder if any of its progeny will ever come into my bag. I suppose all wildfowlers are the same, for I went last Monday and Tuesday with an enthusiastic shooter on my sea-fishing excursion, and more than once I saw him looking longingly at some suspicious-looking long-crosses, flying long end foremost across the skies, whilst we were beating up to windward for the selection of a good morning feed, and it was with deep reverence in his tones that he remarked each time: "Breeding duck!"

Well, we started on Monday morning somewhere about four o'clock, and had the full benefit of a spanking breeze all the way down to Sheerness. Once there, however, we found ourselves in a fix, viz. we had no bait. The tide was high, and therefore no one could look for lug-worms, and these are the bait *par excellence*, after all, for hand-fishing; at least that is my idea, and I have had enough

experience now in that line to know what I am about. Why professionals generally use mussels or winkles is not that the latter are more enticing to the fish than lugs, but simply that they stand more pulling about, and resist better the attacks of crabs and small fry, and probably, by enticing such to congregate around the baits, they attract the notice of larger fish, who thereupon rush in and get caught. So far all is as it should be ; but then one ought to bear in mind that professionals do not fish for the fun of the thing, and do not care for sport as we understand it. They therefore set as many lines going as they possibly can, and under these circumstances it is self-evident that some time must elapse before each line is looked to in its turn, and therefore plenty of time is allowed the fish to hook themselves. Not so with the enthusiastic sea-fisherman, who looks upon the pastime as a sport fit for kings. He does not care to haul a lot of fish without enjoying the whole performance, from the first nibble to the last wriggle, and to the final haul over the gunwale. In one word, it is not the fish we want, it is the catching and its concomitant play.

Now, although river fishing has its charms, give me the sea as a field for sport. Many a fish there gives you as much anxiety and fun as the wildest salmon that ever took an "artificial."

I think sea-fishing ought to have far more votaries, although, mind, it is a sport yearly increasing in favour, and there are nowadays but few sensible people who, when going to the seaside to spend a few weeks in *villeggiatura*, do not, more or less, take to sea-fishing.

I say more or less purposely, for there are all sorts of amateur sea-fishermen. From the twelve-year-old youngster who paddles about amongst the deep holes left full of brine at low tide, to the old gentleman who starts early in his yacht and comes home late, with his creel creaking again under the weight of his catches, there are plenty of intermediary enthusiasts, and even the fair sex take rather kindly to the sport.

Sea-fishing is a jealous sport that requires unremitting attention, and it engrosses your mind so completely that hours flit past like minutes, and I have, sometimes, been utterly astonished to find that several hours had gone by unperceived, whilst I thought I had just come.

This was the case on Monday and Tuesday, although the weather on both days was very widely different.

Old Father Thames, on Monday, had a good mind to get thoroughly cross with the wind, and his heavy yellow waves off the Shoebury were a caution to small craft. Nevertheless, we gave

the fort at Sheerness a try first of all. As we could not by any means get lugs, for the reason before mentioned, we wisely put up with spinners and mussels. The sea was rather rough, but by the time the tide had done its worst we began to experience a little more stability. I rigged out a short rod, which has, in its youth, done service for more fashionable sport, and baiting with a couple of mussels fresh from the shell, I had my first throw. The water, however, was still rather deep, but keeping my weight well off the ground and yet feeling it between whiles, I waited with some hope that was not long deferred. Wriggle-! wriggle ! and whir-r-r ! goes the reel, whilst I steady the line as much as I can, and the rod bends again like a bow.

"Look out, Cook !" I exclaimed, "here's a whacker !"

After twenty seconds' play, we never allow much more, No. 1, a superb whiting, is hauled in.

I was in hopes of seeing a good many more, but that was the only one we caught. My friend fished amidships, whilst Cook, who is passionately fond of sea-fishing, went into the bows, and there dropped two lines, holding one in each hand.

"I have got one," said he presently.

"And so have I," I called out.

"Ditto," remarked my friend.

And up they came, two crabs and a flounder on Cook's right-hand line, a dab and a crab on mine, and a plaice on my friend's.

"Now that the crabs have discovered us," said Cook, disconsolately, "we shall have a job, confound them !"

And so we had. I really believe a whole congregation of them chose our baits as a place of *rendezvous*.

"I can feel them nibbling away at my baits," remonstrated Cook, whilst he shook his lines to make them let go, and I was watching him, when a strong pull nearly bent my rod into the water.

I hauled in steadily; a large flounder, taking a mean advantage of the flatness of his body, did all he could, with sudden and violent flaps and alternate darts, to break my gear, but it held well, and in he came. A splendid fellow, over a pound in weight, and over him clung a small anemone holding the other bait in a tight embrace.

Cook, who happened to be handy, rebaited my hooks and went back to his own.

"Both my lines are being pulled," he said, "but this one has a fellow of some importance, I should think."

And he began bringing it up, but the fish gave such a series of kicks and jumps, that although he did all he could to ease it and

make it come up kindly, it would do nothing of the sort, and after a sharp and severe tussle the line snapped, and both hooks and lead were gone. It must have been a good fish to have done that much, for the line was a good one and not old. But what about the lead—about half a pound weight? That will bother the fish I know, if he has to drag it along wherever he goes.

Well, at about 10 A.M. the tide was low, and as we had given the hint to several mud larks about our needs in the lug-worm line, we tripped our anchor and got under weigh for Queenborough.

Several lads had been looking out, at least so they said, but very few worms had they found, if we were to believe their statements, and one had the cheek to ask us a shilling for a little over two dozen worms.

Seeing how matters stood, I despatched Cook and his mate with a couple of spades and a bucket to look for some, and as I knew Cook was anxious to get plenty of bait, I felt satisfied that he would bring home a tidy lot, and in this I was not deceived. They got together a nice number of large ones, and we went back towards our station, but we anchored a little farther behind the batteries, so as to have more shelter from the wind, which had bothered us not a little in the morning, as, although we were at anchor, it blew so hard and so fitfully that the yacht was continually sheering on and off.

We fared not much better, however, in that respect, and when the tide rose fast and met the strong wind we had regular sea-horses to contend with. Such a state of things was not very conducive to sport, at least for deep fishing, so we thought we would try a little whiffing for mackerel and pollack. What induced us to try was the advice tendered by a shrimper.

"There is a shoal of mackerel in mid-channel," said he, "and if you pull or sail quietly across the tide you will be sure to get some of them."

No sooner said than done. I got my favourite whiffing-line with a silver spinner out of my locker in the cabin, and under reefed main and foresail we went across the tide. The shoal we saw safe enough, but although I tried hard with my most alluring pulls to induce the fish to bite, none would come to the scratch until we were nearly opposite Southend pier, when, in the midst of our despair, we had a bright ray of hope. Rush came a fish, and he pulled like steam.

"Turn her head to the wind easy, Cook; I have got him."

I might have said more truthfully: "I have got them," for whilst I was speaking another fish, jealous of the first, probably, sprang up and hooked itself by the side of its companion.

That was a grand bit of work, and when we had both in safe we kept up with the shoal as far and as fast as we could, but they parted company from us in some unaccountable manner off Shoeburyness. There they were, the top shoals actually rippling the water in their mad rushes like a breath of strong wind blowing on the surface: and lo! whilst we were almost in their midst, they suddenly sank out of sight and disappeared, much to our dismay.

"Ah, well!" said Cook, "I saw a 'porpus' just now; that is what frightened them, you may depend, sir."

Sure enough the "porpus," as Cook called it, rose about fifty yards on our lee, and then rolled over again into the deep. Said Cook:

"If we hold the porpus in sight we are sure to fall in with the mackerel, as he will keep with them if he can, and as long as he can."

Perhaps so, but no fish will bite when they are bothered. Moreover, the sky looked uncommonly squally and dirty, the evening was near at hand, and I thought it best to go back and give the shore another try. We anchored at our old place, and by eight o'clock we had about four dozen fish floundering about on the deck and in sundry buckets. We struck work then, and made tracks for Queenborough, where we anchored a little after ten. In the course of the night the wind altered considerably, and finally it dropped altogether by daybreak. A few gusts alone rippled the Reach when we turned out of the Medway at five. We met several fishermen going to sea, but their evidence, as orally given, was slightly conflicting, one averring that there was nothing to be caught, which assertion naturally drew from me the query: "Why was he going out at all then?" whereas another would say that there were fish to be had, only they were shy. We saw a mussel or winkle boat from Southend, and the men told us that halfway between Southend and Leigh there was a particular mud-bank where dabs, plaice, and flounders were always abundant. We got the bearings of the place from the men, and with a light wind, N.E., set sail for the spot, which we reached, as far as we could make out, at seven o'clock. The weather was simply charming. Instead of the angry waves which on the preceding day deluged our deck, we were gliding along on a sea as smooth as a mill-pond, and most of the pleasure sailing-boats about the Southend wooden pier had their sails up for an airing. Southend itself looked very nice; there were a few bathers, and a man was swimming about with a waterman following in his wake and keeping his boat near at hand, and during the day half-a-dozen

parties were out for rows, and that was all. Southend is a very quiet place, and that ought to recommend it to those who hate large excursion parties, and delight in places where peace and a little sport are to be obtained. There are, certainly, in the town, the pony-chaises inherent to most watering-places, fashionable or otherwise, but even these are not so numerous as to make a fellow ashamed to walk, as when there are so many cabbies anxious to drive as there appears to be mostly everywhere. There are, too, the inevitable nurses and children with spades and pails, intent on fortification building; but that is a matter of course, wherever sand is to be seen.

The pier, however, is a disgrace to a watering-place. How can ladies walk on such a concern? There are spaces left between the planks wide enough to receive, and tight enough to hold fast, any number of those pointed heels that are so fashionable now in ladies' boots.

But to our sport.

In sea-fishing, as in everything else, it mostly happens that just as you have sown so do you reap. This axiom is so well known that it took no fresh order to make Cook alive to the necessity of baiting our neighbourhood, when we anchored for our day's sport. He (Cook) had been for a quarter of an hour out of sight somehow, and when I inquired his whereabouts, he mysteriously popped his head out of the fore hatchway, and intimated with a grin that he was getting the bait ready.

"I don't like," he said, "to waste bait, especially lugs, they are so hard to get nowadays; so I am fastening a lot of them with worsted, and am going to hang the lump on a string with a heavy lead. This I will drop down and pick up again when we let go our lines."

And a very good dodge too; the sight of that bundle attracts fish, and when you litt it out again and they see your lines, of course, the fish bite at your baits readily; whereas, if you bait as some men do, viz. a handful of worms tossed overboard at a time, the tide or the currents take the worms away, and they only serve to feed fish, without bringing them to you.

Cook told us that the trouble and hard work to collect the lugs suggested the plan to him; for, said he:

"It is heart-breaking to have to pop overboard a handful of bait that has cost you no end of bother; and why not save it, especially if it does bring you more sport after all?"

Well, we tried his dodge on the spot, and I can speak of it as a most successful device. Worsted it seems must be used, as other and harder stuff is apt to cut into the worms and let them loose.

We had a most successful haul during the whole morning. Dabs, plaice, and flounders in turn came to the scratch, and the three of us were almost constantly employed hauling up and setting down our lines. We had to recede farther out in mid channel when the tide went out, and there we caught several gurnets and a whiting, by all that is wonderful!

At low-tide we rowed to the pier, and my friend and I landed and went for a stroll into the town, had dinner and a cigar, and returned in time for the afternoon tide, when we resumed sport with unflagging success.

But oh for a crab-killer! These pests bothered us all day; finally, in self-defence, we had to haul up all which took our baits and kill them, as we found nothing would keep them away from our hooks. Shake your lines as much as ever you like, but the crabs will persist in sticking to the bait, and nothing short of crab-murder will rid you of them. So crash! would go our heels over their shells, and, for *oraison funèbre*, someone would remark that:

"That 'ere crab would want a deal of surgical attention before he was fit to go about again without a limp in his gait."

I think we at least caught a couple of hundreds of them, and if it is not enough to rile a fellow, I don't know what is. As for the gurnets we took, they were handsome, large, weird-looking fish. With their large mouths, big eyes, and graceful bodies, they remind one of those dolphins and other queer fish one sees sculptured on ancient monuments, &c.

We had intended sailing back to Erith, but in the state of the wind and tide this was an impossibility, and we had, perforce, to form one of the large fleet of the homeward-bounds that had to anchor in the roads; but, as I wanted to be back to town at night, I was rowed ashore, and took my departure by train. My journey back was uneventful, but I noticed in the marshes at Leigh, Benfleet, &c., several breeding birds on the move, and prayed to goodness that the haymakers, who were then at work, would spare the nests and eggs if they found any.

At dusk I was back, all the better for my glorious trip, and to those of my readers who are in search of fine sport I will say unhesitatingly, get your tackle at once, and go and "wire" into sea-fishing, and if you do not enjoy yourself, then all I can say is, you must be hard to please.

June, 1875.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RAMSGATE, BROADSTAIRS, AND THE SANDS.

So many people go to Ramsgate during the season and remain ignorant of the sport to be had there, that to not a few my narrative will prove somewhat startling. I think, however, that my brother amateur sea fishermen will bear me out when I say that Ramsgate's neighbourhood is not only one of the nearest, but also one of the best of our sea-fishing stations within easy distance of town.

When, last week, we set sail and went down the river towards our new happy (fishing) grounds, any land-lubber might have stood the swell, for there was next to none; and as we passed Broadstairs, *en route* for our headquarters that were to be, as I fell asleep in my berth, visions of Ramsgate in all the boisterousness of its plethora of visitors glided into my dreams. The sands were crowded with people, and what between the visitors, the perambulating cheap dealers, the nigger-minstrel element, and the bathing-machines, it appeared as though a dog could not have found its way through. On the pier were the usual lady readers, always so intent on the contents of their books that they are apparently heedless of your approach, though all the time they have been scanning you and your craft, and making out mentally whether you might or not prove a good catch. (That is another branch of sea-fishing which most writers have omitted from their works.) Besides these ladies were the usual "telescope" gentlemen, who dress in blue serge and talk of the sea. In the harbour were many craft, all gaily decorated with bunting, whilst the strains of a Prussian brass-band were wafted to us over the water.

Well, that was my dream.

The reality was slightly different. First of all the wind fell, and we had to crawl, to bob, to crawl, and to bob again, with an occasional roll on either side until darkness set in. Then a mite of a breeze got itself up, and with our sweeps we managed to make

Ramsgate harbour at 1 A.M., when, I need not say, not a soul was visible, and the fat watermen, who, like their Brighton *confrères*, solicit your patronage by pulling their forelocks, hitching their breeches, and saying with a grin: "A nice day for a row, sir," were all abed and probably snoring.

We got into the harbour somehow, and were thankful to go to our respective bunks when we had dropped anchor and made all snug.

Cook woke me in the morning by tumbling on his face whilst clearing the table of the supper things.

"Very late, sir," said he, "I overslept myself."

I looked at my watch.

"Great soles and flounders!" (a very appropriate ejaculation, considering the nature of our "rural" pursuit) I exclaimed, "nearly seven! Out we get! Here, Charlie! Ship ahoy! Port your helm!"

I threw so much vigour and such a depth of feeling into this performance that my worthy friend, who was sound asleep at the time, woke up with a start, and on hearing my shouts thought that a dreadful accident was going to happen.

"Port your helm! Hard-a-port it is!" called he out vehemently, whilst he tumbled on to the floor, and fumbled about for the tiller.

Laugh, we *did* laugh, Cook and I. Charlie did not at first; he grumbled something about "double-dyed tomfoolery," &c., which only increased our mirth.

Finally he ordered Cook out of the cabin, and ended by laughing at his own ludicrous appearance.

We then half dressed and went on deck for our ablutions, when we found ourselves amidst a little fleet of small craft, whereon some, like ourselves, were having a good wash; others were stretching their canvas, splicing their running gear; others, again, were scrubbing their decks, splashing about barefooted, &c., and the bunting I had dreamed of the night before was now in reality fluttering in the breeze.

Whilst breakfast was getting ready, a man with a pail and a basket came on the pier.

"Want any bait, sir?"

"Yes; what have you got?"

"Anything you like. Shrimps, mussels, lugs," &c.

"Hold on, then, we will have a look at them."

We jumped into the dingy, pulled to the stairs, and came back with a good half-a-crown's worth of those precious "commodities."

"But, my dear fellow," I said to Charlie, "why, in the name

of goodness, did you want to invest in such a lot? half of it will be wasted before to-morrow."

"No, it won't," he said; "we must have enough to fish with all day, and I want some of them to set a long line."

"But we have no long line."

"Soon get one, though; come along," said he, and we went alongside a long, wide, large, open sailing-boat, which was moored near the east pier.

"Smack ahoy!"

"Yes, sir!"

This, from the bowels of the boat, from under a lot of nets, wherefrom popped a man's head.

"Got a long line aboard, John?"

"I have got three, sir; do you want them all?"

"No, one will do."

"All right, sir, I will set it straight for you."

Down went the man under the bows, and he came out, dragging a flat, round basket, in which was coiled a long line, ready for baiting. We explained to him that we had the bait, whereupon he handed us the basket and its contents, then he fetched out two small line anchors, the two end buoys, and there we were, rigged out in a moment.

"You come with us, John," said my friend, on second thoughts, "you know the right places, and you know how to manage these concerns better than we do."

Thereupon, John called out to another fisherman that he was going out to sea, and asked him to look after his craft and to tell his mate of his departure. On this, he jumped in with us, took the sculls, and in two minutes we were back on board, ready for breakfast.

John went down the fore-hatchway, and we soon heard him plying knife and fork with praiseworthy perseverance.

A little after ten we were off.

John took the tiller, as he knew the pet places, and towards the sands we went.

I never see the lightship without horror, somehow, since I happened to witness some years ago the complete wreck near it of a fine vessel, whose crew were nearly all drowned.

We got our long line ready baited, rigged it with anchors and buoys, and only waited until we had reached the proper spot.

"Here we are, sir," said John.

"Is this the best spot, then?" asked my friend.

"One of the best, sir."

"All right, then. Cook, anchor ready?"

"Right, sir!"

To the wind went her head, her sails flapped, and she glided a few yards forward with her own impetus, then came to a stand, and down went the anchor.

We then made everything taut, and got into the dingy with the long line. Charlie had done very well to secure the professional's services, for it requires considerable habit to manage such a number of hooks, and to rig and drop the line safely and properly. I am certain we could not have done it, but the man, through long habit, had a knack of keeping everything in its place until its turn had come to go overboard, and at last we got the end anchor and buoy over, and back we went to the yacht.

"How long shall we have to wait now?" I asked.

"Oh, half an hour, if you like," said the man, "but an hour would be best, as it would insure a chance of hauling in more fish; we sometimes let our lines down two, three, and four hours."

Whilst waiting we rigged out our hand-lines, baited with lugs, and soon dabs, plaice, and flounders began to come up in abundance; occasionally a sole was caught, but only three or four of these especially nice fish honoured us with their visits.

Whilst thus engaged, the sky suddenly darkened, a clap of thunder seemed to split the heavens, and a heavy shower came down, driving us all below for shelter.

"The fish," said the professional, "will bite all the better after the storm, and I warrant the long line will bring up a good haul."

The shower lasted about twenty minutes, and the rain fell so thick at one time as to effectually shut out everything from our sight. It was, for all the world, as if we had been encased in a water-cage, water below, water above, and water on every side.

After luncheon things looked better. A great black cloud was slowly on the slide, and when he had removed himself from over our heads a deep blue sky appeared beyond, and the sun peeped through, then dispelled all moisture, and shone radiantly for the rest of the day.

Down we went into the dingy, and to our first line-buoy we bent our oars. John had undertaken to raise the line, but when he had brought out two or three scores of hooks with about a dozen fish:

"I have all the fun to myself," said he; "you ought to take my place in turns, gentlemen."

We accordingly took our share of it, but it requires a slight apprenticeship to do it, too, as I can personally testify, for when my turn came I hooked every one of my fingers in turns, hooked my clothes, entangled the line, and nearly went overboard as well.

Our catch consisted especially of soles, flounders, and other flat-fish, with a few gurnets, and a number of crabs. Ramsgate Reach is noted for crabs; in fact, I should like to know where there are none.

The way in which long lines are managed differs somewhat from the style in which hand or ordinary line-fishing is conducted, in this wise, that you do not unhook every fish as you bring it up, but go on hauling up, and coiling the line in the basket just as it comes with fish or no fish. You unhook your fish when the whole line is aboard. The reason for this is obvious. If you wasted your time in unhooking every fish in its turn, not only would you give those fish which are still in the water a chance to unhook themselves and get off, but you might also get in a mess with your line by entangling it. Moreover, sea-fishing always entails in the craft a certain amount of drifting motion, which is imperceptible to those who are not accustomed to the sea, but which is not without a powerful effect on one's tackle, so that a strain may at any moment be brought to bear with great suddenness if you don't look out and make haste, and a line that may bear comfortably a fifty-pound steady pull will break under a sudden jerk of the boat; hence the necessary hauling in of all gear before any attention is paid to the fish. True, when fish and line lie together in one heap, a pretty mess the fish, which are alive and kicking, make of the line, but a man who understands his business easily manages to unravel the entanglements by uncoiling his line steadily and coiling it again into another lid, removing the fish and bait from each hook as they come to hand in turns.

This, in our case, John managed by himself, and very well he did it too.

When we came back to the yacht it was nearly 6 P.M., and, to occupy our hands until dinner-time, we tacked across towards the Foreland, and I busied myself railing for mackerel. I had no luck, however, as I did not get a fish, although I had several bites, amongst which was a monster, who carried away a spinner, as an afternoon digestive pill, I presume. I reorganised my tackle, which I baited this time with sole-skin, and on our tack back I caught three pollack, one weighing nearer four pounds than three, and the other two nearly 3 lb. each. This concluded the day's sport.

At half-past eight we were sailing into harbour for the night. Charlie picked out a few fish from our lot for our own use, and sent the remainder to several poor people whose circumstances he knew in the town, and amongst them was an old fisherman, to whom a bright half-a-crown and a basketful of fish proved no small boon.

The last order at night, when Cook brought in our "night-caps" was to be up at daybreak: and, true to the order, at daybreak we were called and went away.

Broadstairs, pretty little Broadstairs, was to be the scene of action. I whiffed all the way, got a mackerel and lost two, through the line being old and giving way twice, and at our anchorage we began hauling up very fast. Flukes—that is, young flounders—were so abundant that they gave us plenty to do to attend to them, but they were so small that we returned them to their "native element," although, as Charlie and Cook both asserted, we caught the same over and over again. Of this I have no doubt, for one that broke a snooding bit again immediately after, and was hauled in with the first hook yet sticking in its mouth.

Broadstairs woke up to the life of a new day at about 7 A.M., and very nice it looked then. There came close to us a professional fishing-smack, with a party of amateurs on board, and judging from their frequent exclamations of delight, they, too, were having very good fun. The ladies were uttering little piercing cries each time they had a bite, and their cavaliers tendered them what, judging from appearances, was a most welcome assistance. I noticed amongst others a couple in the stern sheets, where the rebaiting of the lady's hooks took an unconscionably long time.

Soon after, several row-boats from Margate made their appearance, and two or three yachts went by with their trawls out.

When the tide was high, larger fish came up with it, and the best sport of the day began. Several gurnets were caught, and one which gave a deal of trouble turned the hand-scale down to 7lb. We heard that bream were occasionally caught about in the rocks, but we saw none of them. The fact is, the season is after all but just beginning. In a month's time the fun will turn out in its prime, for then almost every fish will be on the move, and very nice creels can be made at Ramsgate.

I see people are getting alive to the fun of the sport, and this series of articles will supply the general want of information which is felt on the subject of places for sea-fishing within easy distances of London. Last week I treated of Southend and Sheerness, and this week Ramsgate and Broadstairs are on the *tapis*. Now, all these places are within easy reach of the metropolis. The cost

of the journey is insignificant, the accommodation at either place is such as to meet all demands, and the sport is attainable by all, for if boating be considered too expensive by some, there are the piers and jetties wherefrom any may angle. The charge to Southend pier is, I believe, only one penny, and this insures the fisherman comparative quietness, for the ragamuffins of the town are kept away from the tabooed ground by the charge, small as it is. On Ramsgate pier there is nothing at all to pay. But to those who can afford it, the luxury of a boat and of a civil and experienced boatman is an undeniable boon. There are plenty of such to be had, either at Southend, Broadstairs, or Ramsgate. The cost? Well, if you are, or look a "swell" of the first water, you must be charged at swells' prices—stiff. If you are an unpretending, matter-of-fact sort of a fellow, you will soon come to a reasonable understanding with your temporary Charon. Don't come down to the water's edge with all your gear on your back, and all your impatience on your countenance. Walk down to a decent-looking boatman, strike a fusee, light your pipe, offer him your pouch, and enter into conversation with him with the conventional remarks respecting the weather, &c. Then ask him about the fish, fishing, and so forth. He will tell you all about it, and ask you to go.

"Ah, yes; but the expense! You boatmen are so awfully dear," &c.

Ten to one but the man will offer to take you at half the swell's price. However, if there are plenty of amateurs about at the same time, the whole affair becomes one of competition, when he who has the longest purse goes for his fishing, and pays for it. I have been myself in a well-found hired yacht at the rate of half-a-crown per hour when competition was not very great, but I was asked five shillings when crowds were down; whereas when I was the only likely "fish," I could go all day, if so I chose, for five shillings all told.

Some boatmen, however, are great rogues. They stick to their prices, and accordingly get badly rewarded; for it is not always sunshine for boatmen and haymakers, and none but a capitalist or a swindler can afford sailing about continually at the rate of a crown per hour; and as neither capitalists nor swindlers are as plentiful as blackberries, it comes from it naturally that those men who decline tripping their anchor for less pay must remain idle a considerable portion of their time.

There are plenty of such men at the places I have mentioned, especially at Ramsgate; but there are also some good ones, amongst whom there is one at Southend I would recommend.

His name I forget; but the name of his boat is, I think, the *Queen*. She is a fine six-tonner, with no cabin, so she offers plenty of room to fishermen. Her owner is a most obliging, intelligent man, who will take you out fishing or shooting, in season, for about twelve or fifteen shillings a day, including the services of a man to row you about in the dingy if needed. In Ramsgate there are also several good men; but there is such a perpetual change among them that I should not like to mention any, and the best plan therefore would be to inquire of the pier-master.

There are several fishermen, too, who take out parties for night fishing. This, if you are, with your friends, numerous enough to constitute a whole party, or if you choose to charter the boat for yourself, is very pleasant; but, if you will take my advice, never go afloat in such small craft with parties you have never seen before.

If anything, I fancy Broadstairs would be the best spot to patronise, as it is a very quiet little place, and the noisy crowds of the larger town do not care to visit it. As regards sport, its immediate neighbourhood is very fair indeed; at any rate, I found it so, and when we came back we agreed our catch had been extremely satisfactory. I intended giving my readers some hints as to the tackle to be used, but this will come in a future paper. Our journey back was performed in rather boisterous weather, but we pulled through in safety; and I hope my readers will be pleased to hear that, notwithstanding a crack of the boom on his head, "Wildfowler" is still alive and kicking; and intends, if it pleases Providence, to go on many another excursion yet, and to narrate them for the particular delectation of his readers.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

KINGSTOWN HARBOUR AND DALKEY ISLAND.

THIS time, reader, I have made what our Gallic neighbours call *d'une pierre deux coups*—*i.e.* business called me to the "Emerald Oisle," and pleasure took me a fishing in Kingstown Harbour and at Dalkey Island.

Now, I have never seen anywhere (and goodness knows I have been in a good many nice fishing-places) such a quantity of fish as I have met with in this last excursion of mine. Then, query, since there is such a rich harvest to be reaped in the Irish seas, why do not the Irish reap it? In four hours' time by my watch, three of us filled our stern-sheets with splendid fish. Now, if four hours' pleasuring bring such a splendid catch, what would not a day's work bring to three professional fishermen? True, there are such professionals at Kingstown, but very, very few. I was told of four! Do not suppose, reader, that these men have to experience much bother and delay in order to receive in solid cash the value of their day's work. Nothing of the sort. Whenever they are seen coming back, a lot of fish-dealers of an inferior class come down to meet them on the pier. The men, as soon as they reach the stairs, bring up their fish, and dispose of them in sundry lots to suit their buyers. The latter make their offers, and the bargains are clenched there and then without any further delay. This rids the men of their second-rate merchandise. As for first-rate fish, they have no trouble in selling it well. There are fish-dealers in Kingstown and in Dublin who are always ready to buy, and anxious to obtain the pick of the basket under any circumstances, and at remunerative prices to the fishermen.

As regards the Irish coasts, therefore, where fish abound, and pay is so certain and so quick and the dangers almost *nil* (I am speaking of open-boat fishing near the coast), is it not wonderful that many more men do not take to it?

Well, to those cruising yachtsmen to whom the Irish Channel has no terrors, I will say, do not forget to shape your course eventually towards the Howth Lighthouse, then take a tack into Kingstown Harbour, get plenty of bait, start early the next morning, visit the places I am going to tell you about, and if you do not get more fish than you want, and as much fun and sport as ever your heart can yearn for, there must have happened since I have written this a dreadful seaquake, or some other submarine disturbance, which has driven away the tribes of finny inhabitants to some other more hospitable shore.

Plaisanterie à part, success, brother-fishermen, is certain. And to convince you if you are incredulous, listen to my yarn.

When the Holyhead steamer landed me at Kingstown, the first sight that greeted my eyes was a splendid array of fishermen in full swing. Fishermen in small boats were railing for mackerel and whiffing for pollack, &c. Fishermen on the pier, ranged like a regular squad, armed with their sea-fishing-poles, were "shying" their bait away with a will. Younger fishermen, with their legs dangling from the piers over the water, were manipulating their sixpenny hand-lines, and actually a boatful of ladies were busily engaged near the west pier hauling up their catches.

Now all this looked uncommonly like business, and my mouth watered as I watched a sturdy pollack being handsomely brought to bag just as we drew alongside the pier, where the train was in waiting ready to convey passengers to Dublin. Though I longed to feel a wriggle from a hand line I forbore to think of it for the time being; but once free I plunged headlong into the sport.

My bargain was soon struck. I saw an old fisherman in a taut, roomy boat, coiling up a long line, and fixing on it sundry bladders, which he duly inflated for the service on hand; and observing that the aforesaid line was really baited, I conjectured that the man was going to put it down, and thereupon the following conversation took place between us:

"I say!" I shouted.

"Yes, yer honer!"

"Any fish about here?"

"Nat much, yer honer."

"No. Ah well, then," I observed, "I intended going on a fishing trip, but if there be no fish, of course I won't."

At this, the old man was somewhat startled; he scanned my countenance and appearance keenly, and altered his tone directly, as I expected would be the case.

"Wait a mament, sorr," said he, and laying aside his line he drew to the pier. "When I said that there was not much fish

about," he explained apologetically, "I meant that it did not pay us fishermen very well to look after them; but if so it be that you would like to try just for the fun of the thing, I am just the man to show you spart, sorr."

"I thought so," I remarked, "for you look a thorough fisherman all over."

This little bit of innocent blarney buttered up the old boy wonderfully, and won me his good graces.

"If I don't show you spart," said he, "then my name is not Patrick something or other. Are you alone, sorr?"

"No; we are three."

"What time do you intend going fishing?"

"Early to-morrow, and fish all day."

Thereupon we made our contract, and punctual to the hour fixed upon, the old man made his appearance at the hotel, and we made a start.

A chilly, bright morning, a faint streak of light behind the Killiney Hills, perfect quiet in the harbour, where the shipping is still asleep, the railway-station deserted, no cabs or cars on the stand. And so we wend our way towards the sea; the waves are leaping slowly over the slimy green stairs, and a faint breeze ripples the middle of the harbour. A splendid day altogether it promises to be, and we feel very jolly. The old tub is moored handy, and the old fisherman draws it to shore, we all step in, take our seats, light our pipes and cigars, the old man puts up his mast, gives a shove to his craft, hoists up his sail, and we are off.

"Now, gentlemen," said the skipper, "I am going to give you first a little flounder-fishing. Will that suit you?"

Chorus from the stern-sheets: "Anything you like, provided we catch something."

We, therefore, sail out, tack across the Dublin bay, and the next tack brings us down to a favourite spot for flounders and other flat customers of the sea—viz. near the town sewers, where those fish greatly love to congregate.

We find under the seat, in a sort of rough locker, hand-lines, which we forthwith proceed to bait.

Well, I know of old that fish which frequent sewers and such like refined spots delight in more or less rotten matter, and so, without mentioning the fact to my worthy *confrères*, I picked out from under the boards, where I had noticed it lying green and pulpy, a dead lug, and baited my two low hooks with part of it. The job was not particularly pleasant, and I turned my head away to look at the landscape, and washed my hands directly it was done with something like a shudder. Well, no sooner was my line down

than I was rewarded. I was holding it between forefinger and thumb in the approved style, and just keeping it taut with the lead, when it slipped with a regular tug, and I closed my "feelers" on it.

"First catch!" I called out triumphantly.

"You have always luck," said somebody, jealous evidently, whilst hand over hand I hauled in my line, and meanwhile peeped over the gun'ale to have a sight at "them as was coming."

Sure enough, two of them were wriggling to the best of their abilities, but they had to come up and get unhooked.

Whilst I was rebaiting my line, my friend in the bows called out that he too had "something," and he brought out two crabs.

"Well done, by Jove! well done!" we yelled out triumphantly, which so enraged the unfortunate catcher that he smashed both crabs to a pulp.

The next catch was a flounder, and the next was—nothing. My neighbour kept on saying that he had a bite, and then another bite, and he kept feeling his line all the while. Yes, no mistake about it this time, they were biting, and kept on doing so, and so forth, until at last, after a few minutes' silence on his part, I ventured to ask him if the bites were not still going on.

"No," said he, lifting up the lead slightly, and with a doubtful expression on his countenance, "I don't feel any now. I daresay they will come again in a moment."

Meanwhile the other fellow and I were hauling in as fast as we could, and as we glanced at one another behind No. 2's back we could not help grinning.

"Well, this *is* funny!" at last exclaimed No. 2.

"What is?" we asked, innocently-like.

"Why, that I don't get any more bites!"

"Perhaps," I suggested, "there is nothing for the fish to bite at by this time, at the end of your line."

You should have seen him pulling it up, and, of course, both hooks were as bare as could be.

"You would have had to wait a precious while, I think," said No. 1, ironically.

"So I imagine," said No. 2, philosophically rebaiting, when he had also his share of the hauls. Behind us, the baths began to look patronised, as a number of young fellows came into them, and their shouts and plunges were quite refreshing to hear. Several other boats also came round the west pier, and crowded about us. The next boat to us was occupied by a clergyman and his son, both adepts of the first water at the art, for they were continually with a catch of some sort, and one of them actually

took a lobster. This astounded me, and I thought they were having a lark with us when they informed us of the fact, but there was the crustacean all alive O! and anxious to lay hold of and pinch somebody with his long claws. This led me into conversation with "his riverence," as our boatman called the gentleman, and I was then informed that lobsters abound amongst the rocks that constitute the foundations of the piers; and as a proof of this, I was told that the cook to the Royal Alfred Yacht Club made it a practice every day to set some lobster-pots inside and outside the harbour along the west pier, and that he generally made a fair catch for the day's work.

At eight o'clock, although we had made a fair breakfast before starting, all of us began to feel dreadfully hungry. Every chimney in Kingstown was smoking, and the hotel smoke, wafted towards us as it was by the breeze, was so suggestive of a thorough good meal that we could not resist the temptation, and called on our man to up anchor, and take us back to the stairs.

We landed near the baths, on the stones, clambered up the wall, jumped on the pier, and made tracks for breakfast number two. We had caught seven dozen fish in our three hours' sitting, and thought we had done wonderfully well. But that was as nothing, at least as regards weight, to what we did subsequently.

When we came back we found that a smart breeze had risen, a nice, tidy, comfortable sort, likely to take us across from Kingstown to the buoy and back in a couple of hours. We saw several whiffing-boats going out, and we made up our minds to do the same. I had brought two mackerel-lines, and these would do nicely. But who was to fish? I proposed that we should do so in turns, as I know of old that it is well-nigh impossible to whiff for mackerel or pollack with two lines put out simultaneously.

One of my friends tried first, and before we were fairly out of the harbour we caught five fish. They must have been positively teeming. If I tell you that the shoals at one time completely rippled the surface of the harbour for a couple of acres in extent, I do not think I exaggerate in any way. The sport, as a matter of course, was far better outside; and just in a line with Howth, as we went spinning along under our only sail, the fish bit so repeatedly and so voraciously that we were tempted to use both lines. This was our perdition. It does not do to be too greedy, and we learned it to our cost, for no sooner were our two lines astern than, in spite of all our attention and care, they got twisted together in such an irretrievable manner that we had to take them in and try to set them straight, failing which we had to give up whiffing, much to my sorrow, for I consider it to be the grandest

of all sports. No one who has not felt the tug of a strong mackerel would imagine that such a comparatively slender fish could produce such an unearthly tug. He is here, he is there, he is everywhere, and in his mad rushes resembles more a flash of lightning than anything else.

My favourite bait for this sort of thing is a piece of the white, cut from the under side of the first fish you catch. It shines like silver, and looks more natural and is more attractive than the artificial silver spinner, although this is certainly very catching also, but it must be kept very bright—the brighter the better.

Some people bait all their hooks, and assert that occasionally they get a whole haul—*i.e.* a fish on every hook. I have never had that luck, but have sometimes taken three fish at one haul. But then I rarely bait all my hooks, considering the spinner a sufficient attraction as a general rule.

Well, our lines entangling themselves in such a desperate manner put a stop to further whiffing operations; and it of course happened when we were just in luck, and right out and away nearer the Howth side of the bay than our own.

"Never mind, gentlemen," said our old boatman, who clearly prided himself on showing us what sport was in Ireland; "we will very soon be back against our shore, and I will take you to a spot where you will catch large fish."

"What sort?" we inquired.

"Oh, all sorts; you will need there rather strong tackle," he said, "for my flounder-lines won't do."

"I have two strong lines," I remarked, "somewhere in my creel; hand it over here."

But, alas! for human calculations; when we arrived in sight of Dalkey, we found half-a-dozen boats hard at work in the best of the tide, their occupants fishing away like steam.

A soldier, to whom our boatman spoke as we passed him, exhibited a carp, whose weight was not certainly under 8 lb. or 9 lb.

This sight wound us up with a vengeance, and after having moored our craft somewhat nearer the island than the shore, we began operations at once.

My line, to begin with, caught in the long weeds, and in spite of all attempts to extricate it, I had to break it. The worst of it was there was a fish on it at the time, and this made the unlucky incident all the more aggravating. I had to rig out another line with the remainder of my own, and some of the tackle of our man. But, as he had told me, so it proved true; his tackle

could not hold the best fish, and we were very soon completely disabled.

We then went to Dalkey, and bargained with a fisherman for his lines. He did not mind parting with them for a consideration, and we had to pay for them "through the nose" accordingly. But we were so bent on fishing that we would have paid a higher price still without grumbling.

We then rowed back to our station against a most tremendous tide, and when we anchored, the boat kept shifting so suddenly and violently that ours was truly fishing under difficulties.

Nothing daunted, we carried it on, and success rewarded our efforts. Now, I do not call bream fine fish, at least as regards the table; but it is certainly a fine fish to catch, and this being so, we were well satisfied. I caught one about two feet long to begin with, and my next neighbour at the same moment had a severe tussle with two that would not come up. In another boat was a gentleman who was fishing with a rod, and he declared it to be the grandest spot he had ever taken fish from. If it were not for the strong sea-weeds which there abound, the sport would be an undiluted joy; but these blessed weeds were a thorn in our sides with a vengeance. On the other hand, the fish probably would leave the spot if there were no weeds about, as in most likelihood they feed on them, or at least on some parts of them, as well as upon the grubs and worms in them.

As it was getting late I gave up fishing, and busied myself in setting right a mackerel-line out of the two that lay in such confusion in my creel. On close inspection I found that both were caught in the swivels, hence the bother they had given us. Well, of two evils we must choose the least, and as I could not expect to have the use of both lines on that particular evening, I sacrificed one for the sake of the other, and a few judicious cuts with my penknife set the matter straight. I knew evening whiffing to be most effective, and I foresaw that our return journey would be a rather tedious affair, as we had the wind against us, and would have to row all the way back, so that a little diversion in the shape of railing would while away the time.

When the new line was ready we got up our moorings, and my two friends took up the sculls, much to the old boatman's gratification, and he sat very contentedly by my side, and enlightened me with his professional lore whilst I whiffed over the stern.

So long as we were in shore but little sport attended my efforts, but when once we set her head across the tide, just at the mouth of the bay, they began to come, and soon half-a-dozen beauties were in with us. It was getting very late, the sun had set behind

the hills in the west, and I was wondering how it was that we were making such little way notwithstanding that our two oarsmen were pulling their best.

"It is the strong tide," said the old man; "if we were nearer shore, we would soon get back; here we have wind and tide and all against us."

We took the hint, and, drawing near the pier, soon turned into the harbour, and when we jumped on the stairs, safe and sound but very stiff, felt that we had really enjoyed ourselves, and that the sport on that glorious day was fit to have been placed before a king. Indeed, I do not remember having before met with such splendid sport, notwithstanding the little annoyances which are incidental to most human affairs, but which, sooth to say, after all, in our case only gave our sport a relish.

Well, that was the only day I could spare on the Kingstown waters. Would it could have been a week! Tourists and yachtsmen, who intend visiting Ireland, make a note of it. If you wish to enjoy thoroughly good sea-fishing, and have every comfort as well, Kingstown is the station for you, be it said without any detriment to the sporting capabilities of any other well-known resorts of sea-fish.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE SOUTHAMPTON WATER.

THERE are few places on the coast of England where more amateur sea-fishing is carried on than in the Southampton estuary. This estuary is always well stocked with fish, in spite of the numerous steamers that continually trouble its waters; but then it is in some parts so wide, and therefore some of its nooks are so far from the usual thoroughfare, that virtually the wash of the steamers can produce but little damage.

For an amateur, therefore, who likes fun, and who dislikes long journeys or incurring danger, I would certainly say that Southampton would prove a most suitable station for a lengthened try at sea-fishing. The kind of fish to be caught there varies, as it does everywhere else, with the seasons, and, moreover, for some unaccountable motives, even in their season fish appear and disappear with startling inconsistency. Thus, I have seen in August perfect loads of mullet being hauled up one fine morning. The next morning not one could be caught, and the same is frequently the case with bass. These fish, as every sea-fisherman knows, are not very particular in their diet. I have fly-fished for bass, and I have whiffed for bass; I have caught them with all sorts of artificial and natural baits, with flies, with lugs, with mackerel-skin, with sole-skin, with all the spinners that ever were invented, and in almost every case when the fish were about, the catches were good.

Why I was not so successful last week in my trip on the Southampton bay, I am not prepared to decide.

When we started it was about 6 A.M., and there was a smart breeze blowing down against the flowing tide, which seemed to promise us some sport. Our skipper, a professional, knew well what he was about, and he took us across the tide, from shore to shore, in a masterly fashion, whilst we tried our best, turn by turn. I

went in for it first, and whiffed with a very fine line, and moreover, for fear of startling my customers, I baited with one bait only during most of the whole time. First of all, I tried a spinner. Two tacks satisfied me that there was something wrong with that inducement. I therefore took it off, and put on instead a leash of flies. That time there was some bidding; but it was not very lively, and not very lasting either, for, after I had brought in two bass (the smallest specimens that were available within the reach), the competition ceased; and thinking my want of success might be my fault, I resigned the post of honour to my anxious companion, who had been all the time bothering me with advice.

He met with no better success, and seeing our boatman inclined to be jocose at our failure, I quietly drew him out, badger-like, and with my own line induced him to try his hand at the game.

Watch in hand, I allowed him half an hour, and though he, seeing how matters stood, two or three times declared his willingness to relinquish the line into our hands, I kept him at it until he was satisfied that his or anybody else's cleverness was there totally without any retribution.

Now, what was the cause of it? Our man averred that he had himself caught several fine fish the previous day.

"What did you bait with?" I asked him.

"Sand-eels," he replied; "but your bait is just as good."

I was not so sure of that, and thought that had we provided ourselves with some live sand-eels, we should have had better sport.

Well, we had got our landing-net ready, but it was not needed that day, at any rate, for the fish we caught were all light enough to be taken in without any fear of our lines breaking.

When we went below for luncheon we were opposite the estuary that reaches Waltham, and into this estuary our skipper resolved to take us.

"For," said he, "if we anchor there, we may have better chances with our drift-lines than we have had hitherto with whiffing."

My companion declared himself inclined for a nap, and I left him smoking a cigar on one of the cabin cushions. Our man was forward, evidently indulging in some forty winks, too, for I heard him snoring portentously ere my first fish was hooked.

Rather dreary work this, to be fishing alone, some may think. And so it is when the fish will not bite; but when they do, it

would make no difference to the fisherman if the whole world were gone to sleep, barring himself and his fish.

Well, I duly baited my whereabouts, then I rigged out a rod, fastened it lengthwise over the stern so as to easily topple backwards and forwards whenever any bite should take place ; I baited the hooks with mussels, and with a good swing at arm's length, sent the lead flying some twenty yards off. This done, and the lead having reached the bottom, I drew in the line to the reel, and secured it there. Then I set about rigging a hand-line for myself, but while doing so, bob ! went the rod, so suddenly and so violently that I had to give up what I was doing and see what was going on there. It was a pollack, small breed, but very lively nevertheless. Well, I thought it better than nothing, and I began to feel interested in the proceedings. I rebaited, recast the line, and made all speed to get mine under weigh. I baited with a piece of lug on one hook and a piece of mussel on the other, mentally thinking that I would thus provide attractions *pour tous les goûts*.

But I think I had hit on a good spot, where the fish were on the feed in earnest, for I began to be so busy that I actually got bothered. What with my line being loaded, and the rod threatening to bob down perpendicularly into the water, I was kept in such a perpetual run that I began to feel rather warm, and between whiles I took off my coat and waistcoat, clapped on an old straw hat, tucked up my sleeves, and set to in earnest. The tide was on the ebb, and the fish kept headway to it in regular shoals.

Some mackerel paid me a flying visit, but did not stay. I caught several pollacks, five mackerel, and any number of flatfish.

A man in an open boat came up to ask for a light, and the bump of his craft against ours woke and brought our boatman up, when, at my request, he went below again to get me some refreshment. Presently he popped his head out again, and in a stage whisper he said :

"Shall I call your friend, sir? He is fast asleep here, rolled off the cushion on to the carpet, and got his head under the stove."

"Well, but the stove is not lighted, I hope," I said in some alarm.

"No," returned he.

"All right then, let him sleep ; I don't want to be bothered by anybody ; and since he is enjoying himself in his way, let me enjoy myself in mine."

I have rarely spent such a delicious afternoon. To begin with, the weather was lovely, and though the sun was rather hot, its warmth was well tempered by the breeze.

Now, I wonder there are not many more people than there are taking their holidays on the water. Can there be anything more pleasant? Is there any other means of locomotion half as charming as sailing? First of all, your motive power does not tire, as a horse is bound to do if you are driving or riding. Secondly, you have not the noise, vibration, and awful smell of steam-power, as when you travel by steamer, or the screeching and rumbling, as when you go by train. On board your small craft you are better than a king in his kingdom; for whereas the latter, however large, is necessarily confined within frontiers, there is no limit to your navigation; you may go wherever you please, if you think your craft is strong enough to stand it, and if you have the pluck to try it.

I thought of all this on that afternoon when, seated astern, I was feeling my line with one hand, and keeping a watchful eye on the rod. It is not the first time that I have harped on this string, and neither will it be the last; for I know I am right, and I think unprejudiced, and therefore I do my level best to drive the truth home, with what success remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there are, nowadays, many more people who resort to the sea for pleasuring than ever was the case before. This is as it should be.

And now to return to our sport.

It happened that some two or three hours later, when the boatman went into the cabin to rummage for some article or other of which he stood in need, he woke up my companion, who yawned, stretched himself, and asked where I was and how I was getting on.

"Oh!" said the man, "the gentleman is getting on first-class. I believe the three buckets are full by this time."

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Then, by jingo! I will have a try, too."

And up he came. I had heard the whole conversation, and greeted my friend with a hope that he had thoroughly enjoyed his outing.

"I am ashamed of myself," said he, "and will remedy my loss of time."

But the fates had decreed that it should be otherwise, for our man, looking up towards the New Forest hills, shook his head grimly.

"What is the matter?" I inquired.

"A storm brewing," said he.

"Why, then," said my friend, "I vote we get off with all speed;" and with great alacrity he began bundling back his apparatus pell-mell into his basket.

"Don't be in such a hurry, the fish are biting," I said.

However, all was of no avail, and I coiled up my gear and wound up my line whilst the two fellows were tripping her anchor and setting sail.

After all we had no thunder, but a jolly good shower came down with such a hearty will as to make us thankful to get into the cabin, shut the door, and let the man navigate the boat by himself.

This was easy enough, as all his running tackle was rigged astern, close to the helm, so that a single hand could manage her at any time without help. The storm over, the weather cleared up; and, as I knew that fish bite always better after a heavy downpour, I called out to the man to anchor somewhere on a muddy part, where flat-fish would be likely to be found, and we resolved to spend the rest of the evening at that spot.

My friend had then his first real turn at the fun, and we began enjoying the sport well, as the fish were coming up readily.

Then we had a bit of a sensation.

"This time," said my companion, suddenly holding up his thick line with both hands, and playing it in the approved style, "I have caught a monster. I wonder what it is."

I gave up my line and took up the gaff.

"How does the line feel?" I asked anxiously.

"Very heavy, indeed," replied he, "and the fish is surly."

"It is some deep-sea fish, you may depend upon it, sir," said the boatman, who had got ready with the landing-net on the other side of my friend, "and you must play him carefully, otherwise he will make a sudden rush, and bolt with hooks and all."

"I don't know what sort it is," said my companion, "but he allows me to bring him up," as he hauled it up slowly.

"Be careful!" I said.

"Steady, sir!" remarked the boatman.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the "liner," who had been peeping overboard, and trying to fathom the mystery, "it is a conger-eel!"

"What!" we exclaimed incredulously, "impossible! There are no conger-eels about here."

"It must be an ordinary sort of eel then, but of an uncommonly large size," rejoined my friend, "for I see it quite plain, and it is hooked somewhere about the middle of the body."

At this piece of news I "smelt a rat," and so did the boatman; for we simultaneously put down gaff and landing net, and boldly looked over the gunwale, in spite of my friend's entreaties that we should not do so lest we should induce the fish to break away.

"Oh, he won't break away, sir, you need not be afraid," said the man; "I will bet you half-a-crown you land it safe enough."

"Oh, do you?" retorted the other, "then done with you."

"Right, sir, it is done. Haul away; it won't bolt."

He hauled away accordingly, and, to my friend's great mortification, the sublime catch proved to be that of a piece of rotten rope a yard and a half long!

The tide was getting low once more, and a good many open boats began to show themselves about, as is usually the case in all estuaries where the traffic is sufficiently lively to insure a good deal of odds and ends getting eventually washed ashore, there to be picked up by those who make it their business to look after such things.

Our boatman related to us several rather startling stories of what some of these men have occasionally found; but, as it is hardly here the place to narrate such affairs, I will leave them for a more fitting opportunity.

We found on inspecting our store of bait that we had, notwithstanding the liberal use I had made of them, a good deal yet left, so we resolved to set a trot with the rest, and await the result.

My friend and I then arranged the line, we tripped anchor, and ran up the foresail only, so as to get on quietly, and, barring a broken hook that caught on the taffrail, the affair was managed fairly enough.

After that we ran in shore, and there in a creek I observed a man and a boy spearing for eels and flounders. When they came by they told us that the flukes were very abundant, but the eels very small, so that sport was poor in their line. The man said that he had eel-pots down in the next creek, and I took the opportunity to ask him if he had ever seen galvanised-iron pots being used about that part. No, he had not; and remarked that he did not think they would catch as well as the old-fashioned wicker-basket pots. Why, he could not tell; but he fancied the fish would get scared by such, whereas the wicker-work assimilating itself readily with the ooze seemed to the denizens of the deep perfectly natural, and they did not seem to mind them at all.

"Yet," I remarked, "in rivers, galvanised-iron pots answer pretty well."

"Yes; but then," objected the man, "they are usually set at places where the fish are bound to be caught. It is quite a different affair from sea-fishing, where no currents can be depended upon for any length of time, as the tide alters them according to its flow or ebb."

"Well, and what do you bait your pots with?" I asked him.

Whereupon he scratched his ear and looked much tickled.

"Of course, at the price of meat," said he, "it is rather hard to get anything, and fresh rumpsteaks would hardly pay, even if they could do; but we manage somehow."

"But how?" I insisted good-humouredly, for I meant to fathom the way in which it was done.

"Well, in a large town like Southampton," said the man, "there is always plenty of refuse to be got, and meat offal is the best bait that I know of for eels, and that is what I bait my eel-pots with. Your very good health, sir!"

And he drained off his glass, whilst I vowed mentally never to indulge in a dish of eels on any pretence whatsoever.

Meanwhile, our time drawing short, we bade the eel-spearers good luck and went to pick up our trot. Only five fish caught; but all our bait gone.

Mullets have not come yet, but in two or three weeks' time there will be good fun with them for those who like deep-sea fishing. I have had a letter from a Blackwater professional, and he tells me that the sport is sure to be very good then, and he will drop me a line as soon as it will be worth my while going down. I wish the news would come soon, for of all fishing that of mullet is one of the most pleasurable. If any of my readers would wish to take their share of the sport I would advise them to secure young Clark, he knows what he is about, and if they don't get sport with him there will be none to be had, for he is an experienced man, and a most civil and obliging fellow to boot, and he always does his best to insure comfort and sport to his passengers.

July, 1875.

CHAPTER XL.

HERNE BAY AND WHITSTABLE.

THERE never was a more welcome change in the appearance of things than we witnessed last Monday morning, somewhere about 2 A.M., when we tripped our anchor at Erith, and dropped down the river with the tide and a moderately fair wind.

After the late downpours of rain it was quite exhilarating to see a pure sky above one's head, and to notice that a radiant sun was rising, already very hot in its slanting rays.

There is no pleasure that can compare with the pleasure of sailing when everything is *couleur de rose*, as you have plenty of time to look about you and to think, which you cannot very well do when the wind is strong, the sea rough, and all your attention and care needed by your craft.

But on that memorable morning everything was of the mildest description, and as we dropped farther and farther down, the river appeared as quiet as a lake.

We sailed as far as Gravesend without meeting anyone out, saving a suspicious-looking black wherry, tenanted by two men, perhaps bent on picking up what they could find or borrow.

Gravesend was asleep when we passed, but below, about the Reach, we fell in with a fairly numerous muster of river-craft, and moreover—note ye this, wildfowlers of the coming season—we saw already a good lot of sea-birds about, and as wildfowl shooting and sea-bird shooting begin on August 1, I am glad to see such prospects of sport in store. I have already looked up my shoulder-guns, and have been making small-shot cartridges, and early in August will have a shy at the birds. Sea-shooting in summer is a very interesting sport, and if you dress lightly, provide yourself with sand-shoes and strap a pair of mud-shoes on your back, you will find it an amusing way of spending your time on the seashore. I cannot conceive how a man is content to remain

day after day lazily dozing on the sands, or tiring his eyes with reading a lot of silly novels, when he could pick up such a variety of entertaining incidents in the course of his pursuit of sport.

Well, on our voyage—a short one, in truth, but a mighty pleasant one—we saw, besides a very tidy lot of waders of the small sort, several larger birds, amongst which were several "'erns," as old Joe used to call them.

I was in the cabin putting on my boots, and the yacht was leisurely gliding along the Essex shore, when, on looking through the open window in front of me, I saw by the sea-wall a congregation of these birds. They were a good way off, but there was no mistaking them, and I pointed them out to a young friend of ours who had joined us for the trip, but who is not an experienced fisherman or shooter as yet.

Well, he, like most people that are unaccustomed to the ways and manners of water birds, was deceived. The quietness of the birds, their stiff attitudes, the gray tint of their plumage, somewhat like the top of wooden piles, induced our friend to think that I was mistaken.

"That," said he, emphatically, and looking at me askance (to ascertain whether I was joking or not, I suppose), "if *that* is birds I will eat my hat!"

At this most ungrammatical sentence I appealed to Charlie, who was at the tiller. He merely glanced at the birds, and nodded; but thinking probably that it would take more than his word to convince our unbelieving companion, he did not say anything, but merely handed him his glass.

"Well, I *am* blowed!" exclaimed our novice, "so, they are birds after all, and, oh! I say, what whackers they are, to be sure! There is one now actually scratching his head with his foot," &c.

"Yes, that is all very well now, but don't think, young man," I said, "that you are going to put us off the scent by your ornithological remarks. Nothing of the sort. You said you would eat your hat if these were birds; well, so they are; proved to be by your own mouth; and I will now trouble you to make a meal of your *castor*."

We all looked so serious, that the young fellow, I am certain, thought for a minute or so that we meant to make him perform this unsavoury feat.

In the marshes before reaching the Medway we saw countless flocks of birds, amongst which starlings were rather prominent, and I am certain I have never seen such a quantity of young birds for many years past. Sea-gulls were also very numerous, and

several flocks of plovers came by too, but these were gray plovers or sea-plovers, and were few and far between. I saw no golden plovers.

In the sheep-marshes, below the Island of Sheppey, there were lapwings, an early curlew or two, and the oxbirds, though not in flocks, were very plentiful.

This being the case, we arranged for an expedition against them early the following week, weather and my arrangements and engagements permitting, when I would tell my readers what luck befell me; and as when we rounded the Isle of Sheppey the shore was numerously tenanted, we resolved to give it a try at the earliest opportunity.

A few miles below on our right was Whitstable, with its shipping and fishing fleet partly at anchor and partly under weigh. The tide was low then, and those of the craft not intended for work were stuck high and "damp" on the mud and shingle.

"Now," I remarked, "is our time to get bait; the men ashore never think of digging for bait unless it has been ordered beforehand, so I vote some of us row ashore and do the business."

No sooner said than done. Cook brought out a pail and a couple of mud-spades, and rowed ashore to a fine, lonely stretch of mud that had evidently not been disturbed. In half an hour we had a bucket nearly full of splendid lugs.

There were lots of craft about, hundreds of sails being visible around us, and the smacks were having a glorious time of it. About a score of yachts were about the Thames Essex shore, that is, some ten miles from us, and several steamers were passing up and down somewhere about Southend, whilst tugs and sailing-ships were crowding over the estuary. The sea was like a looking-glass, there were no waves, and no rolling; one would have thought that for once the sea had forgotten to ebb and to flow. Our young friend was very enthusiastic.

"If this is sailing on the sea," said he, with deep conviction, "I must say that it is awfully nice, and I like it very much;" this was spoken during a perfect calm.

To return to our fishing; we picked out a fair bottom, and installed ourselves comfortably fore and aft as soon as the anchor was dropped. Our youngster had brought a fishing-rod with him, and I had two in a rack. We took advantage of the calm to use them, and I think it is the best bit of fun one can have; for the fish are always more numerous and more ardent feeders at sea than river-fish, so that you get plenty of nibbling, of hooking, and of by-play; and with the rod you enjoy it all the more for not getting your hands wet, as you are bound to do when you hold

your sea-line between your fingers, and have to haul it up by hand. Moreover, a sea-fish plays well and strongly, though it does so by fits and starts, and the way rods are bent and righted again is a regular caution to bamboo sticks.

Our novice was in ecstasies; his shouts could have been heard all over the Island of Sheppey, at Sheerness, Southend, Whitstable, Herne Bay, Margate, and Ramsgate—at least we told him so.

"I have got another!" he would yell, fairly dancing on the deck; "no, by jingo, I have got *two!*"

That "two" was screeched in such a victorious and stentorian key as would have done honour to the lungs of a wild Indian.

"Well, sir," said Cook to him during a lull in the hauling, "you *do* enjoy it and no mistake. We had an old lady once aboard—my governor's aunt—and she, like you, enjoyed it awfully. She yelled and screamed just like you."

The idea of screaming like an old woman moderated the youth's enthusiasm, and we had henceforth a little more peace.

When we had caught some dozens of flat-fish the biting stopped, and we bethought ourselves of going farther south. Before proceeding in the matter we went below for lunch, and discussed our next movements. We did not know much about the places, but Cook enlightened us somewhat.

"Where we have been fishing now," said he, "we were just opposite the coast-guard station, and a mile or so from Whitstable, and I think we have done pretty well so far; but Herne Bay is better still, and when once we have passed the Oyster Company's Pier we shall be all right. However," added he, "there is a fisherman just astern of us, shall I ask him?"

At this piece of news we all went on deck and questioned the smacksmen.

"There ain't much fish about anywheres," they said; "but if you are on the look-out for dabs, and plaice, and flounders, and the likes, just for the fun of the thing, why there are enough of them opposite Herne Bay; and, somewhere halfway between Herne Bay and the point farther south, there are poutings to be caught in the rocks."

Well, we of course went. There was no wind, not a ripple on the sea, and it was hot with a vengeance. We were an hour and a half going from Whitstable to Herne Bay. We passed the Oyster Pier, and the Royal Pier, with its little kiosque and its diminutive flag, and there we were before the little town. It was about 3 P.M. then, and there was but little life in the place, as visitors were few as yet. There were a few bathing-machines

out, and several people were disporting themselves with such evident pleasure that I suggested that a bath would do us good, and divesting myself of my clothes, overboard I went. Charlie followed suit, whilst our young friend looked on in amazement. After floundering about for a quarter of an hour we clambered on board and came to an anchor.

We were about three-quarters of a mile from the beach, and according to the directions of the fishermen, who had followed in our wake, the ground was bound to have some fish.

And it had. We baited in Cook's style for a few minutes, and when we let our lines down we had our work cut out for us. Nobody but ourselves appeared to be fishing, although there were several row-boats about with gay parties on board. One of these boats, with about six or seven ladies, came to see what we were after, but the others kept nearer the beach, and we had no other visitors. When the ladies' boat had retired, our novice evinced a strong desire to go after it, and we indulged his whim by allowing him to take the dingy, when he went in hot pursuit; but he was soon tired of the job, and came back half an hour later reeking with perspiration, and with his hands well blistered.

Meanwhile we had been having very good sport.

The lines I use for this sort of work and for pouting are not quite like those I have seen described in some works on sea fishing, and with due deference to the authors of such works, I fancy mine is the better plan. The lines, as described, consist of a lead weight, through which is passed a wire chopstick, with loops at both ends, and to these loops the guts and hooks are fastened. Now I contend that with such a line more than half the sport is lost to the fisherman, simply because he does not *feel* all the biting, and that *is* the fun. Even if you hold the weight off the bottom, as is recommended with such systems of lines, the performance is neither easy nor pleasant. It is not easy, because when there is any swell about, or any rolling motion, your weight is bound to go down with a slap on the mud each time the boat gives a lurch; moreover, if you have to hold your weight, and feel it at the end of your arm all the time, although its density is diminished by its being immersed in the sea, yet it is tiring.

I manage somewhat differently. I rig my line with a weight more or less heavy, according to the state of the tide, the depth of water, and the strength of the stream, and just above the weight I fasten a long piece of whalebone, at each end of which I secure my snoods and hooks. Now, whenever there is a bite the wriggling is instantly felt by the hand, and you give the

line a lift at once, which secures your fish ; whereas, by the other mode of line, before you feel anything the fish must have hooked itself so irretrievably that his motions actually shake the lead of your line. That is not artistic fishing. I like to feel, when I hold my line, as though it were a telegraph wire, so that where it touches my hand I am told all that goes on at the bottom. This is decidedly amusing. But, casting a baited line overboard, and allowing it to succeed or not, according to the fishes' voracity or nibbling propensities, is what I call a duffer's performance, and certainly no enthusiastic amateur would resort to it. It is allowable for long-line fishing, trots, &c., but not for hand-line fishing, under any circumstances; and therefore anything that tends to prevent the angler from feeling all that takes place at his bait ought to be discarded, not only because it prevents his enjoying the fun to the utmost, but also because it is not so killing.

For instance, with one of my lines, the very instant a fish bites, up goes my hand with a jerk, and he is caught. If I had not felt the biting I should not have had him, perhaps.

We spent part of the afternoon dab and plaice fishing. Towards five o'clock we got up anchor, and went towards the spot where we had been told pouting were to be found. There were several boys bathing on the beach, and one actually swam up to us, to the great admiration of a few visitors who were promenading on the green sward leading to the cliffs. The boy rested awhile on board, and went back the way he had come, whilst we kept watch over him for fear of an accident.

At 6 P.M. we had a lot of our fish served up all hot. A sportsman is always fond of the game he has shot, and an angler finds an especially nice flavour in the fish he has caught.

After tea we tried for pouting, but we were in a bad place to begin with, and were bothered with weeds and rocks. We removed a little farther off, and there the fish fed, as they usually do, voraciously; but there were not so many as we could have wished. Nevertheless, we had very good sport, and broke two lines, which shows that large fish are to be found there.

The season for sea-fishing, however, is not at this time of the year quite as tempting as it is in the autumn. In September, October, and November, codling of large size are to be caught there, as well as dories and pouting; and bream, I daresay, are also to be found in fair numbers; therefore, as the season advances, the prospects of sport will but increase, and those of my readers who may chance to make Whitstable or Herne Bay their places of *villeggiatura*, will do well to give sea-fishing a trial there.

A word of advice will not be out of place here. When you intend going for a sea-fishing trip, make your arrangements, at least the day before, with a boatman. Otherwise, you will find that if you wish to go on the spur of the moment (unless the fit takes you in the nick of time, when the tide is low and the flats are therefore accessible), you will be unable to gratify your wish, as lugworms do not keep, and no one would dig them on the off chance of being eventually enabled to get rid of them. Therefore, bear this in mind, and always get your man to know your wishes beforehand.

As regards boats and boatmen, there are plenty to be had at Herne Bay, and when we dined in the evening at one of the hotels, I inquired what were the men's prices, and I learned it was eighteen-pence an hour for three persons, they providing baits, lines, &c., and these I do not consider exorbitant terms.

Whitstable is more commercial, and sees more traffic by a long way, than Herne Bay. The latter is essentially a pleasure spot, and very quiet. The drives are nice, apartments rather few in number, and prices seaside prices; but it is everywhere the same.

As regards sport, I have stated what is to be expected in the way of sea-fishing. With the gun there are always a few birds to be bagged, and I should certainly advise an intending visitor to Herne Bay to take his gun and ammunition, as well as his sea-lines, down with him. He is sure to find some employment for both, if his views are moderate, and he does not spare his legs or his time. I may go down with a gun, one of these fine days, and will then say what there is to be done; as far as I could cursorily observe there is fun to be had, and those shooters who intend trying it will, I believe, be well repaid for their trouble.

We came back in the night, and meeting a slight head-wind off Southend, we had a little pitching, which made our young companion extremely uncomfortable, and he declared when he landed that it must have been very stormy indeed. He will live to learn better one of these days. Altogether, our trip was one of the pleasantest it has been my good fortune to join in, and I sincerely trust those of my readers who patronise Herne Bay will enjoy their visit as much as we did.

July, 1875.

CHAPTER XLI.

PLYMOUTH AND THE EDDYSTONE.

One of the best stations for sea-fishing on the South-Western coast is undoubtedly Plymouth. The position of its harbour, and the shelter it offers to the fish when rough winds are blowing great guns past the Lizard, are advantages of which the finny denizens of the deep are not slow to avail themselves. Professionals and amateurs have there consequently, almost in all seasons, a wide field for sport or business.

In fact, in Plymouth Sound there is always something to be caught, let the wind blow from whatever quarter, and the weather be what it likes. This is so well known that very few tourists visit Devon without paying a visit to Plymouth, for the sake of its sea-fishing, and the number of boats that one may see in the Sound, when the weather is fine and suitable for pleasure-parties to indulge in the sport, is next to incredible.

Last Tuesday afternoon, taking advantage of the lovely weather and of a couple of days at my disposal, I packed up half-a-dozen lines in my creel and went to Paddington. I arrived at Plymouth somewhere about midnight, and found myself in the coffee-room of the hotel with a gentleman, evidently an admirer of the gentle craft too, for he had a basket almost large enough to hold a decent-sized sperm-whale, and his show of hooks and tackle, as displayed on his table, would have done credit to any moderate-sized shop.

"I have taken your overcoat, stick, rod, and fishing-basket into your room, sir, No. 6, if you please," said the waiter to me.

I nodded my thanks. But the information thus suddenly brought in had evidently enlightened my companion.

"So," said he, "you are going to fish about here?"

"I am," I replied.

"Do you know anything about the place?" he asked.

"Rather."

"Well, might I make free to ask how you intend to proceed? I am a stranger here; I have heard a lot about the sport to be had, so I came down, having nothing else to do; but where to go and how to get there are two riddles, as I know no one about here."

I asked my newly-made friend to join me in a glass or two of wine, and forthwith I explained to him my *modus operandi*.

"Early in the morning," I said, "a boatman will call here for me. If you like to come with me you are quite welcome, and I shall be most glad of your company."

"Bravo!" said he, and we thereupon shook hands on the bargain.

Early in the morning the man called, and after a quick breakfast we loaded him with a well-filled lunch-basket, and wended our way towards his boat.

"Now, Morton," I said, "have you got plenty of bait?"

"Plenty, sir," said he; "and as there is plenty of fish, we will have a cargo aboard I am certain afore we turn her head back towards harbour this evening."

On board we went, and Morton's son, a lad of some seventeen summers, but with the back and shoulders of a Hercules, clad in a blue jersey and a pair of long sea-boots that reached to his thighs, jumped forward and let go the moorings. With the jib out and foresail well filled, mainsail hoisted, and a fair breeze, the little cutter-rigged boat flew out to sea.

The morning was most lovely, the sea looked fresh, and the little wavelets ran after each other in endless confusion. I got out a mackerel-line, and whiffed right through the bay, with most gratifying success. Scarcely had the flies and spinner been out than I had a strike, and brought two in. Another cast, another tack, and ere we had been fifty yards under weigh another haul took place. I then handed my line to my *confrère* of the hook.

"Try your hand now," I said; "I think you will like this sort of thing."

And he did like it, so much so that it cost him a good deal of self-abnegation, at least so he said, to allow me the use of my own property again. In half an hour's time we caught over a dozen beauties.

"This," I remarked to my companion in confidence, "is but an eye-opener. Our two friends here will show us what sport is before we take our leave of them, I know. At least, I have always found them most clever at their calling, and they know all the best points about."

"Well," said my new friend, "I certainly saw a good deal of fishing going on about the town yesterday afternoon. On the breakwater there were at least thirty rod-men and boys enjoying themselves. I spoke to two or three. One of them had several large fish, uncommonly heavy."

"They were bass, sir," joined in the elder boatmen. "There is a lot of them round about here just now, and by-and-by I hope I shall make you bring a few whackers to creel."

We had not seen anybody about as yet, it being so very early; but before another half-hour had elapsed the shore-anglers began to crop up here and there on the headlands, and along the breakwater, like so many mushrooms, whilst a large fleet of decked and open boats appeared leaving port and in the offing.

"It is astonishing," said Morton, "what a deal of difference a bit of sunshine brings into the sport, and into our pockets. Why, for three weeks, I have had only two parties out with me in this here boat, whereas for the last week or ten days we have been hard at it from morning till sunset every day, and I have been making my earnings reach the rate of £5 or £6 a week in pay alone, without mentioning the fish that many of my customers leave to me. I hope this weather will last, that is all."

Whilst discoursing thus, and with the whiffing line in play, we headed for one of the buoys, where Morton warranted us sound sport, as he called it. As soon as we had anchored, and whilst he and his son were making everything taut, clear, and snug:

"What is it to be here?" I inquired.

"Pollack, bass, &c.," he shouted back.

There was a tall man a short distance from us, alone in a boat, and he seemed pretty busy, judging from the style in which he kept running from stern to bows of his craft, and back again.

I rigged on my rod, and tried a minnow, "with a screw on," as Morton calls a spinner. My companion lost some time in getting his own line under weigh, and mine was therefore the first out. I had made two or three casts, and had felt as yet no sign of anything being about, when away went the bait and round went the reel.

"Look out, junior!" I called out to the boatman's son.

The young fellow took up the gaff, and jumped down by my side with the airiness of a young elephant.

"It is a good fish," I remarked to him; "be sure not to miss it."

"All right, sir; if you give me a good aim, he will be all safe."

Well, I brought up my fish, and just as the boat was giving a

lurch to leeward, young Morton cleverly hooked him, and relieved me of any further anxiety. Thereupon, there was great commotion on board our craft.

"He weighs eight pounds, if he weighs an ounce," said my friend.

"No, sir; not so much as that," replied the boatman; "gentlemen are very apt to be deceived in the size of sea-fishes."

"Well," I said, "I will warrant he weighs nearer six pounds than five. Bring down the spring-scale."

We hooked him, and he pulled it down to six pounds and four ounces.

Meanwhile, my companion, thoroughly excited by the sight of my sport, was making all speed to get ready, and as usual with people in a hurry, everything with him was going wrong.

One of the men lent him a hand, and he soon was at it, too.

The worst fish I caught weighed a couple of pounds. Then he caught one about four pounds, and I had three successive runs of two, four, and three pounds respectively.

We had no end of sensations. First, one large fish was missed, and the gaff cut the gut, thereby liberating not only the fish but the artificial minnow. Of course, it was not my fault, neither was it the gaffer's; and he and I shifted the blame on each other's shoulders with great good humour, until another rig was adjusted.

Meanwhile, several other boats had anchored near us, and some were as successful as we were. One boat in particular, with three Plymouth gentlemen, was doing wonderfully well.

At eleven, I began to feel uncommonly sharp set, and requested our young fellow to go down below, and see how the luncheon basket was getting on. He, being probably as hungry as we were, took the hint very readily, and dived below, when we soon heard the rattle of the plates, forks, knives, &c. He then spied an old bell, and began ringing it vigorously, as stewards are wont to do on board passenger vessels, and not yet content with that signal demonstration, which had set us all laughing,

"Dinner, gentlemen!" called he out in a stentorian voice.

And we struck work, there and then, and went below in great good humour with ourselves and the world at large.

But, oh! what a grievous failure! When the salt, which was kept on board in an old gunpowder tin case, was brought to view, it was discovered that the tin case had somehow been knocked under the flooring, and sea-water having got in, the salt was totally unfit for the table. Here was a poser, and we looked at each other with blank dismay.

"I can eat without salt," said my friend; "but things are mighty tasteless then; what is to be done?"

The two men were having a slight discussion on the point, the father hinting that the son was the cause of all the mischief, whilst the son vehemently denied being guilty in any way whatever.

"I will tell you what is to be done," I observed; "it is no good quarrelling. Let us sail up to another decked-boat. They may have what we want."

Up went the foresail; we got down the boom of the mainsail, which we had got previously halfway up the mast, so as to be no impediment to our sport, and getting up our anchor we took a cut across to a six or seven tonner, which was sailing towards the Point.

"Smack ahoy!"

"Ay! ay!" from a man with a short cutty-pipe in his mouth.

"Have you got any salt?"

"Eh! What?"

This unusual question actually had made the man take away his pipe from his lips.

By good fortune they *had* some salt, and that is how it came to pass that we were enabled to enjoy our meal, after all.

After luncheon sport was still more lively than before. We felt naturally more comfortable after our meal, to begin with; but, in sober reality, things had taken quite a bright turn. The weather had become finer still, and this had induced a regular array of fishermen to come out. The breakwater was lined with them. Every buoy had a boat moored to it, and many other boats had anchored about the sound.

"If you like," said the skipper, "we will go to the Rame Head; there are fine pollack, bass, and bream about there. I have got lots of sand-eels—fresh ones—and we are almost sure to fall in with fish."

We agreed, and—

"Off we go, then, John," said the old fisherman to his son, and in half a minute we were away.

The Rame Head is fully ten or twelve nautical miles from Plymouth, unless I am very greatly mistaken; but it seemed as though the distance was but a quarter of its real length, for, in an incredibly short space of time—

"Ready about!" called out the man. "Get anchor ready. Let go!"

And down came the mainsail, foresail, and jib, and with a great row of the iron cable the anchor was let down.

"Now, gentlemen, if you don't land some of them 'tain't our fault," remarked the old boy; "for this is about the smartest piece of water from the Eddystone Lighthouse to Plymouth."

The sand-eels, forthwith, were in great requisition. My friend used at first an artificial one, and I used the old man's live ones, and had no cause to regret it. My first pollack was a stunner for his kind, but the next fish, a bass, which took a fancy to my friend's bait, gave us a rare bit of fun. In the excitement of the moment, our friend's hat got knocked off and fell overboard. Of course, it floated, and the wind blowing it towards the Stoke Point bade fair to land it there in the course of the day, and our friend in his anxiety to land his fish and to save his hat nearly lost both.

"Hold on, sir! hold on!" said the skipper; "we will get your hat soon enough if you first get rid of your fish. Bring him in, sir, gently. Here he comes, and"—swash went the gaff—"I have got him!"

And he dextrously jerked a fine fellow on to the flooring.

We should have had to go in chase of the hat had not a yacht's crew spied the incident, and watched the unruly headgear's proceedings. They picked it up, and with a good deal of chaff restored it to its owner. The latter, to tell the truth, stood it like a brick, and never wincing, even when told "to screw it on next time," returned tit for tat to the best of his abilities, and he was no mean hand at that game. The chaff over, one of the Corinthians asked what sport we were having. When we had told them:

"You should go farther south," said he, "where we are going. We got a regular load of whiting yesterday. We are going there now."

"By-and-bye, we will go," we shouted, and with a wave of the hand and a cheer they went their way.

About an hour afterwards we saw them coming to an anchor some six miles away from us, and, judging from appearances, they had reached their favourite spot, for they remained there the rest of the day.

Then an open boat with two gentlemen and a boatman drew up to us. They had lost all their fishing-gear pretty nearly. Could we oblige them with some of our spare tackle? We mustered about half-a-dozen gutted hooks, with which they were well satisfied, and dropped back to their station.

By that time we had, I am sure, a hundred pounds weight of fish on board, if not more. In fact, the sport was quite first-rate, any way. It could not have been better anywhere. As for my companion, he was perfectly delighted.

"I will stop in Plymouth," said he, "the whole of my vacation; I could not have better sport if I tried ever so many places, so that is settled."

And, there and then, he made an overture to the man to take him out daily, weather permitting. I envy him his treats.

Meanwhile time was flying fast, and already several boats had tripped their moorings, and were turning homewards. This was a hint not to be lost sight of, and we accordingly bethought ourselves that ten or twelve miles with a somewhat cross head-wind was a fair distance to cover in a couple of hours or more, and that if we did not wish to be belated, now was our time to turn her head towards harbour. The skipper, however, was very reluctant to go.

"I have brought as fine a long line," said he, "for conger as any man could wish to have the handling of, and we have lots of lugs at hand, besides sand-eels and mussels; then why not stop until the long line be set and taken up, when we might go home?"

"When might that be?" I inquired.

"Oh! about twelve or one in the morning," he replied. "You see, sir, the best spot is away beyond the Eddystone, where, amongst the rocks, the congers like to congregate. Now to get there from here would take us an hour or an hour and a half; time to set the line and to lift it, another hour or two; and then our journey homewards would fill up the chinks."

Of course he would have liked that course to be pursued, having an eye to business, and knowing well enough that the laying of a well-baited long line for the night-feeding of conger-eels was sure to be a well-repaid venture; but we did not care much for it. Night-fishing has not much attraction for amateurs, except when quite a novelty, but it was not new to either of us, and we accordingly declined the trip, much to old Morton's sorrow, and much to his son's gratification. The youngster had a sweetheart ashore, and preferred, naturally enough, courting to conger-eeling.

Moreover, as far as I was concerned, I had a lively recollection of a memorable night conger-eeling expedition, in which I had been a very willing assistant at first; but when, at about 1 A.M., our boat-lamp had gone out, and there was no more oil on board to set it going again; and when on the line being lifted we found ourselves beset by our congers, crawling everywhere and laying hold of everything they could stick their teeth into, including our feet and legs, whenever these useful appendages of ours happened to be in their way; and when one—a monster—chased us all in turns seemingly, and nearly drove us all overboard, the whole affair

going on in the most perfect darkness, and with a rough sea on that shook us well, and tumbled us all sorts of ways, making us tread here on an eel, and slide there on another, &c. I repeat it, when the remembrance of this jolly treat rose into my mind, I involuntarily ejaculated: "Not any conger-eels for me, if you please!"

I was young at the time of that expedition: but the saying that youthful incidents are indelibly stamped on one's memory has proved in my case perfectly true, and I shall never get particularly fond of night conger fishing. If I recollect aright, we fought that monster conger-eel of ours with perfect frenzy, but our blows seemed only to inspire it with more liveliness. As to laying hold of it and cutting off its head, that was a feat we all thought of, but which none of us would dare venture upon performing: for had not our boatman told us that they bite like sharks, *even* when their heads are cut off! I had, at the time of the occurrence, serious thoughts of climbing up into the rigging and staying there until the monster was got rid of. However, as it had still the hook in it, by laying hold of the line, we bundled the whole lot—line and fish—forward down into the hatchway, clapped the hatches on, and went home.

This expedition took place on the coast of Scotland, at a rare place for congers.

I do not know if the Eddystone rocks contain such enormous specimens as are to be found in the north. I think not; at least, I never saw any approaching the size of the Scotch bred monsters. But, whether big or small, it matters but little: since that affair, night conger-catching has lost its charm to me.

Well, at ten o'clock we landed, hearty and wonderfully hungry. As I had to leave for the north in the course of the following afternoon, I recommended the men to call for us early, so as to get as much fun as possible in the short space of time which remained available.

They came at 4 A.M., and we first tried bream or chad fishing, with lugs, near the breakwater. We chanced to come upon the chads when they were on their morning repast, and hauled in a score or so in a little over an hour. Then we went in for whiting, and whilst the boat was got ready I prepared the deep lines and their leads. I had heard that the whiting were very numerous, and so they were. We took in five or six dozen between us, the two men joining in the fray with a will. By the time we thought about getting refreshments, I had to think of going ashore and catching my train. We therefore had to eat our lunch whilst the boat was under weigh, and on reaching the town I bade my friend

good luck and good-bye, and made my way to the station. I entered it just as the engine of my train was having a preliminary screech or two, previous to making a *bonâ-fide* start. I had just time to commission an official to start home my creel, rod, and general paraphernalia, including several fair-sized samples of our catches; he got me a ticket, I took my seat, and we were off.

A visit to Plymouth will be amply rewarded by first-rate sport, with many species of fish. Therefore, any enthusiastic sea fisherman, on the look-out for a suitable station whereat to make a lengthened stay, cannot do better than pitch his tent at Plymouth.

According to my notion, the best spots for large fish are at the Rame Head, at the Point of the Sound, and round about the Eddystone Lighthouse, but many shore anglers do very well indeed from the headlands and breakwater.

If, however, you are, reader, a good sailor, take my advice and go about in a boat; that is the way to do it, when you can spare the time and the money. Anyhow, the sport is just now worthy of a king, and I do not think the Plymouth fishing was ever better.—*Verbum sap.*

August, 1875.

CHAPTER XLII.

HASTINGS AND ST. LEONARDS.

WELL, yes, there were crowds down at Hastings and St. Leonards. There was no mistaking it; both these "institutions" were rejoicing in the presence on their shores of a plethora of visitors. The tide was making up when I arrived, and by the time I reached the shingle, the whole body of *villeggiatours*, temporary and permanent, had been driven by the sea against the wall; and on the few yards of hard pebbles which the sea could not cover, they sat with that beatitude in the countenance, and that idleness in the posture, which are so characteristic of people who have made up their minds to enjoy themselves by doing nothing.

There were, however, a few adventurous spirits who ventured into the "sailing yacht just a going to start, gentlemen." The said yacht, a yawl, was placidly waiting on her slips, until her passenger cargo was complete, when her crew let her go, and she slid into the sea, cargo and all, and sailed away like a duck on a mill-pond.

Very good dodge this; it saves the ladies any unnecessary wetting of their feet, but it certainly does look peculiar.

The sea was very smooth within half a mile of the shore, owing to the wind, N.E., blowing from behind the cliffs, rocks, and town, which thereby protected the water from being roughly handled, as it would undoubtedly have been, had it been blowing from any other quarter.

There were a score of rowing-boats about. Most of these were loaded to their gunwales, and the hired men had to do all the pulling, whilst their parties enjoyed their outing, the braying of brass-bands, the melancholy tuning of a couple of harps, and the screeching notes of a flute, which was held the whole afternoon under the nose of a practised tormentor.

"Go for a sail, sir?"

This was addressed to me by a long-shore-going-looking sort of a fellow, dressed in a waterman's clothes. "The yawl is almost ready to start."

"What!" I said, "in this boat of yours, with all these ladies and gentlemen at sixpence apiece on board?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, no; I am afraid I should not enjoy the trip. I intend taking a boat and going fishing."

"There is no fish, sir," said this interested party. "You had better come for a sail with us."

But there was no fear of that, and as to there being no fish about, I knew better.

I went down along the shore until I came to a respectable-looking elderly fisherman, who was waiting for a fare.

I always prefer elderly people for that sort of thing, because they have a deal of experience on hand, and know a trick or two worth knowing, besides being as a general rule very steady men. The old boy was not slow in perceiving that I was a likely fish to engage him, for before I had opened my lips on the subject he had found time to say with great alacrity:

"Want a boat, sir?"

"Yes, I do; I want to go fishing. The tide suits just now, but I cannot go yet awhile, as I have had no lunch; but whilst you get ready and procure plenty of bait I will go to the hotel, and will be back here in no time. You have no lugs here, as the shore is all shingle, so what bait do you use?"

"Mackerel and squid," said he.

"Well, can you get any?"

"Plenty; I will get half a pailful and four or five mackerel."

Off he went, and off I went.

Half an hour afterwards, as novels say, we could have been seen in the boat steering for the Channel.

"If I remember things aright," I remarked to the old man as we were getting abreast of the pier, "the bottom where we are now is rocky, and there are plenty of conger-eels and other rock-fish to be caught here."

"Yes," he said, "plenty of 'em."

"Very good, then; ship your oars. We will try this spot first if you please."

He rose from his seat with the slowness of age, carefully put aside his oars under the thwarts, and slid overboard a large stone for our moorings.

"I never uses an anchor for this 'ere part," said he, "'cause anchors catches into the nooks and holes in the rocks, and it is

the devil (excuse me, sir, for saying so) for pulling 'em out again. I was once half an hour getting out this 'ere anchor in the bows, so 'once bit twice shy,' as the saying is."

This with a knowing wink.

Whilst discoursing thus I was preparing my lines, and the old man, when he had anchored us safely, placed a board across his knees, drew a knife out of his pocket, and wiping his nose on his sleeve—

"Which shall it be first, sir," said he, "mackerel or squid?"

"Mackerel, by all means, I retorted; "somehow the brilliant white of the skin always attracts fish, and next to lugs that is the bait I prefer."

"Well, mackerel be it, then," said he; and diving his hand into the bucket, he drew out a mackerel, placed it on the board, and cut it into bait.

Overboard went the head and tail. Then he cut it open, sent the backbone to join the head and caudal appendage, and cut the two sides into slices, each with a brilliant piece of skin to it."

"You are an old hand at that game," I remarked, "and I thought so when I first caught sight of you."

Then he told me how many, many years ago it was since he first began sea-fishing, &c.

Meanwhile I had baited one of my best lines, a thin but strong one, of best material, but in which the old boy placed no confidence.

"If you do hook a conger," he said, "you won't get him."

"Why?" I asked, rather amused.

"'Cause he will smash that thing of yours in no time," he said. "Now, look here, sir," and he produced from under his seat a bundle of lines, which, at first sight, one might have been excused for taking for the boat's painter; "that is the sort of lines I use, sir. Them lines don't give way."

"No, I should think not; but they kink, curl up, and bother you; and moreover," I said, looking at his hooks, "yours are white hooks—they are no good; at any rate you lose with them as much fish as you catch. I don't lose any with mine, I warrant you; and, by Jove!" (this with a pull) "I have got one on now."

"Well done!" said he; "I see you know what you are about."

Up they came, for I had two, a small whiting and a conger-eel about two feet long. The latter had already passed the hook completely through his upper jaw, and had climbed up to the whalebone, coiling up the plaited gut round its body during the journey.

Now, however much I may dislike fishing for congers at night, I rather like it in day-time; precisely, I believe, because they do give such a lot of trouble.

The first one cost us no end of bother, owing partly to its liveliness, and partly to the mighty careful and gingerly way in which we handled his congership.

"Them fish is rather savage," said the old man, laying his heel on the conger's head, so as to solve the difficulty. "I know a man here who got one finger bitten off by a large one, four or five years ago. That makes other people careful, don't it?"

The whiting was a fine fish, in very good condition, and I trusted many more would be about.

My next catch, however, was still more bothering than the first. I had scarcely felt the lead reaching the bottom, when the line was literally pulled through my fingers. At last I got a firm hold of it, but the fish at the other end was my master for some time. He pulled, and I pulled: finally he got under a rock and remained there immovable.

"It is a large conger, undoubtedly," said the boatman, "and you will have some trouble in getting him out and getting your line back, any way. At any rate, 'twill try the stuff your line is made of."

And so it did. It is astonishing how cunning and how powerful congers are, when they can manage to secrete themselves anywhere. This one I repeatedly brought out, and had to let go again. I began to think that I would have to give up the contest; but I made up my mind to make the conger feel it anyhow as a solace to my feelings, so I set my knees firmly against the seat, and pulled with a will, until the line stretched to its utmost, and could stretch no more; the fish, meanwhile, never moving more than a few inches at every pull, and resuming its former place at once.

"Now," I said, "I think I had better bring up the line, either broken, or with the eel, rather than be kept here the whole afternoon waiting."

"Well," the old man remarked, "if you were to slacken the line a bit perhaps the conger would venture out if he does not feel the hook pulling him any more."

"Yes, he might: but he might also take advantage of the lull to hide in a still safer stronghold. I know what they are. This one has felt he was caught, and will not allow himself to be brought up, unless by main force. Now or never."

So saying, I hauled on the line, and I nearly went on my back, my whole length, on the flooring.

"Hook broken," I said, "but lead safe, and here it is."

I soon set on another hook, baited copiously, and dropped my weight at the very same spot; hoping, in my heart of hearts, that I might hook the monster again.

Wriggle, wriggle! Up goes the line, and this time I bring up a yard-long eel. That was not the one I wanted to catch though.

Thus we went on, bringing up congers and whiting alternately, until we had quite a respectable show. The old man had set a line of his own going, but he only caught three or four fish. True, he did not take all the trouble I took. Possibly the sport has lost somewhat of its charm through being practised by him for so many years. At any rate he did not fish well at all, and his tackle, as I remarked before, was of the grossest description. A heavy lead crossed with a yard of wire chopstick, and, at each end, two or three long snoods of line, with clumsy, large white hooks, such is not an apparatus likely to lead to any delicate enjoyment of the sport of hooking.

Our pastime was, from its queer surroundings, made peculiarly enjoyable. Imagine a nice pier covered with promenaders, the shore thronged with a motley and lively crowd; lovely weather; a smooth sea; round us lots of rowing boats; farther out, in the Channel, a perfect panorama of sailing-vessels and passing steamers; join to this the strains of several bands and the grinding of sundry organs, the joyous shouts of the crowds, and the lively ditties sung by some wandering minstrels, and you will come readily to the conclusion that ours was anything but a spleen-breeding occupation.

In fact, although I have several times gone on fanciful sea-fowl shooting expeditions in small carts drawn by donkeys and ponies, and two or three times have ridden a "moke" bare-backed when engaged in that pursuit, yet I must confess that my trip to Hastings procured me, for the first time, the satisfaction of catching congers and whiting to the lively tunes of choice selections from "La Fille de Madame Angot," and to the melodious air of "The Village Blacksmith."

So those sporting sybarites who like to enjoy all sorts of comforts and entertainments at one and the same time, will do well to book a sea-fishing trip to Hastings during the season, and my word for it, they will have plenty of fun for their money. The arrangements of the railway company are most pleasant to tourists, as there are several trains going straight down from London Bridge, Charing Cross, and Cannon Street in a little over an hour and three-quarters. This I call extremely enjoyable. Nothing tires people more than long and protracted journeys.

especially when bent on pleasuring, and therefore such quick arrangements of the railway company readily explain the patronage and presence of the large crowds at both Hastings and St. Leonards.

Well, somewhere about two o'clock the tide turned and began to run out with most extraordinary speed, so much so that before our leads had time to reach the ground they were drifted ten or twelve yards from the boat.

This was unpleasant for two very excellent reasons. The first was that we could not feel the fish biting so well, with our lines describing a parabola, instead of being more or less perpendicular to the bottom.

The second was, that when hauling in the lines was the object in view, it was not to be effected without some considerable tact and care, as the hooks would, when being thus dragged about, catch in sea-weeds, sharp rocks, and what not. This, I need not say, in spite of all due care, led to no inconsiderable disasters, and line-mending became an imperious necessity in more cases than I cared to attend to.

Necessity, however, is the mother of invention, and, I may also add, of motion. Bothered at seeing my hooks repeatedly going, going, and gone! I suggested that the sooner we shifted our quarters the better, unless we wished our stock of hooks and tackle to run out altogether.

Well, the old boy, like all elderly people, was averse to any shifting, on the ground, I presume, that it would entail some extra exertion on his part, and declared "there was no better ground than where we were, the tide would be all right in an hour or so; besides, the sea was rough farther out," &c. &c. To this I replied that there was plenty of just as good ground about, where the tide was now right, and as to the sea being rough, I did not care a rush about that.

The old man, seeing that I was in earnest, set to work at once and away we went. However, he evidently meant to have it out of me in some way, for when we cast our anchor there was not a fish to be had.

"You old rascal!" I thought to myself, "I see your little game, but I will lead you a dance, I know, or my name is not—— 'Wildfowler.'"

So, after two or three ineffectual casts, "Off we go!" I called out; "there is nothing to be had here, and we must go on moving until we do hit upon a good bottom."

"Oh, must we?" said he.

"Yes," I nodded emphatically.

He again looked at me slyly and said no more, but laying down his coil of line hauled up our stone, and this time, as I expected, took us in a rare good spot. No sooner was my line down than I had several nibbles.

"That will do," I said;" let go."

And we anchored there. Scarcely were we settled than I got two whitings up. Then a gurnet, a fine large fellow, very beautiful in all its dazzling colours; then a conger, a small one, which meant swallowing the whole line in some way or other. After that, I broke both hooks in a bunch of sea-weed, and had to resort to my "second fiddle" until the old man had repaired the damage done.

When this was right it was evening, and almost time to go ashore. I was debating within myself whether to go there and then, or spare another hour to fishing (for it is a sport I dearly love to enjoy), when an unexpected turn of events soon settled the question for me.

You must bear in mind, kind reader, that the weather, throughout, had been of the most lovely description, and I had never dreamt of bringing a waterproof overcoat with me.

Well, I was stooping over the gunwale whilst hauling up my line, and I was looking at my hooks, when I felt two or three large drops of water on the back of my neck. I thought the boatman had done it for a lark or by accident, but looking up I perceived that the sky was rather dim overhead, and it was quite black and stormy-looking behind the ruins on the tops of the cliffs. Moreover, shore-umbrellas were hoisted, people were running to and fro, some were hiding under the high and dry bathing-machines, and the rest were making a fair bolt home of it.

"I think we shall get it hot," I said to the man.

"Yes," he returned, "it do look squally. Shall I pick up our moorings, sir?"

"Rather," I said, "and as quick as you can, too."

In this, however, he was unable to attend to my wishes. He had evidently settled into a humdrum sort of style, so I made up my mind that I should get well drenched ere reaching shore, and in this I was not in any way deceived, quite the reverse. It was quite refreshing to see how it did come down on our two unprotected heads.

The old fellow said something about his "rheumatics." "Bother your rheumatics," I said good-humouredly, "pull away! Why, confound it, we are here as though in a shower-bath, in this tub of yours. As soon as we get ashore I will stand you a jolly stiff glass for your 'rheumatics,' but don't let us get drowned here like two rats; pull away!"

The prospect of a stiff glass drove away the thoughts of "rheumatics" which impeded our progress, and we shot through the water with a speed I had not suspected my companion of being able to produce.

Well, the rain kept up in a dismal drizzle until 9 or 10 P.M., and then the weather looked anything but promising. Nevertheless I made arrangements with my old man for an early start in the morning, provided things looked somewhat more cheerful.

Punctual to time we went. The wind had veered somewhat more east than on the preceding day, but the sun was shining in all his glory, the dark clouds of the storm had disappeared, and everything promised us a brilliant and pleasant outing.

We were four this time. I had met in the town two friends of mine, and they had joined me in the trip. I wanted to see what the St. Leonards coast might have in store, and we accordingly tried it first. We used the same kind of bait as I had done the day before, and met with very fair sport. We first tried within 400 yards of the shore, and found our catches perfectly similar in kind to the fish I had caught at the same distance from the Hastings shore, whence I conclude that the belt of rocks which lines the coast there, goes down some distance towards the Point in the west, if not even past it. Our boatman, however, could not enlighten us on that subject.

"We very rarely go out fishing so far," said he, "for fear of being caught in a squall and being driven out to sea. But sailing-boats do very well there. There are lots of whiting to be caught, and sometimes mackerel, and brill, and so forth. There is a gentleman who goes there trawling as well as fishing with deep-sea-lines, and I have seen him coming back with rare loads of all sorts of fish, but as to the net's share and the lines' share in the lot I cannot tell."

At nine o'clock we went about a mile out, and conger-catching was thereby put to a decided stop, whilst several kinds of whiting were brought to hook. The damage done to the lines was, however, extensive there, too, on account of the tough weeds that "bottomed" the sea; in fact, there was always at least one of us mending his tackle, and more frequently two, whilst at one time we were all at it.

We came back to lunch at about twelve, and at 3 P.M., resumed our sport, but remained opposite our landing-place, at a goodish distance from the shore.

A lot of sea-gulls came to look at us, and several row-boats

drew near. The remarks passed within our hearing by some visitors were thoroughly cockneyfied.

"What are them four fools looking over the side of their boat for?" said one to his boatman.

When told that we were fishing, and when he saw that we were hauling them up fast,

"I am jiggered," said the Cockney, "if I don't have a shy at it too! Got any line or things to fish with?"

"No, sir, but we will go ashore, and I will get some."

And they went.

Towards six o'clock we took up our moorings and went ashore, as I wanted to get back to town that night, and thus ended my sea fishing excursion to Hastings and St. Leonards.

We caught nothing very wonderful in size it is true, but nevertheless we enjoyed ourselves very much; and as the journey is so short, and there are, I understand, pleasure trips organised throughout the season from London to the two towns, many hookers may be induced to try the sport there.

The boatmen's terms are two shillings per hour, for a short period. Five shillings for three hours, or half-a-guinea for the day. On those terms they supply you with lines, bait, &c.; but take my advice, *provide your own tackle*, if you wish to really enjoy yourself, as the tackle usually found by the men is anything but conducive to high-class sport, on account of its clumsiness.

August, 1875.

SEA-FISHING AND SEA-FOWL-SHOOTING EXCURSIONS.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DEAL, THE ROADS, AND THE SOUTH FORELAND.

A FRIEND of mine who had gone down to Deal in order to recruit his faded strength, as he expressed it, wrote me word, the other day, that the fishing was somewhat lively there; and as Charlie was with me at the time the letter came, and was, moreover, yawning with *ennui*, and did not know what to do with himself and his yacht, I settled the difficulty for him there and then very easily, and he was, he said, truly thankful for my good office.

"Where is your boat, now?" I asked him after reading the note.

"At Rosherville," said he, sipping drearily his lemonade-and-sherry.

"Well, then, read this," and I handed him the letter, whilst I looked for a Bradshaw all over the room, and found it, finally, in a game-bag.

"There is a train from Fenchurch Street in forty minutes," I said; "it won't take me ten minutes to get ready, if you lend me a hand, and we will go down to Gravesend, get aboard, and sail to Deal; will that do?"

"First-class!" said he joyfully; "but what am I to lend you a hand to?"

"Well, whilst I put on my clothes (for I cannot very well go in my shirt-sleeves), if you will hunt for some cartridges, 12-bores, out of that long open drawer, and bundle them in a game-bag that will help me considerably."

Meanwhile I sent for a cab, and by the right time we tumbled into the train and rattled away down in Essex. When we arrived at Tilbury we found the usual ferry-steamer waiting to convey passengers to Gravesend; but as our yacht was somewhat higher up than the Town Pier by a quarter of a mile, I opined that a waterman's boat would be just then the most suitable means of progress, and so we got into a wherry and the men rowed us to the yacht. Nobody could we see on board as we went towards the little craft, and when we drew nearer and challenged its presumed occupant, no one answered. Charlie began to feel cross.

"The beggar," said he, wrathfully, "has left the boat, you may depend upon it, for a spree on shore; but as sure as fate he will get the sack for it."

"Well, of course, you are the owner, and can do as you like in the matter," I remonstrated. "But if I were you I would overlook it for once, for Cook is otherwise a trusty and clever hand, and if you discharge him you will have a job to replace him, I can tell you."

"I know that well enough," rejoined he, "and that makes me all the more riled, because I thought I was well suited with the fellow; but, don't you see, leaving the yacht is a grave affair; anyone might come on board and plunder the boat or slip her moorings, then pick her up and claim salvage, &c., as some 'water-rats' did to the boat of a friend of ours, a few years ago, if you remember."

Meanwhile our men had brought us to and we clambered on deck. Charlie and I went forward—there was no Cook there; but in the cabin, luxuriously stretched on all the cushions, and snoring portentously, we found our fellow enjoying himself. The two men and the two of us burst out laughing at the sight.

"Is not the beggar having a fine time of it?" said one of the watermen, looking at him with envy. And he woke up. Up he jumped, mumbling his apologies, but I believe none were needed, for Charlie was but too well pleased to find that his surmises had been incorrect.

"As soon as you feel bright enough," said he cheerily to Cook, "we will set sail."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the man, kicking his shoes in his own berth and running barefooted on the deck.

We got off well, notwithstanding the crowd of craft that were about. Whilst Cook and I were managing this, Charlie went below and wrote out a list of our necessaries. We then sent Cook ashore in the dingy to buy them, and picked him up opposite the Harmer Street pier.

The wind was pretty fair and rather rough, which caused the Reach to be in a lively turmoil. We had to clap on the hatches forward, and with a well-deluged deck we went our way rejoicing. We met several passenger-steamers, all well-laden apparently, besides the usual screw-colliers and traders and innumerable sailing-vessels and tugs. As evening drew near the wind increased, so much so that we thought it best to drop behind the Island of Sheppey for shelter, and anchor there for the night.

"Early in the morning," I said to Cook, "you and I will get into the dingy and go about for oxbirds, &c., before we try fishing."

At 9 P.M. we had supper, then Charlie proposed to me a game at *écarté*. We played for half an hour, and talked for another half-hour on deck, whilst smoking our last pipes and drinking our grog. We saw the lights of Whitstable and Herne Bay as plainly as possible, and with the glass could distinguish shadows moving about on the beach. The water was smooth where we were, owing to the shelter the island afforded us, and also to the fact that we were quite out of the way of the traffic.

"Shall I keep watch, sir?" asked Cook.

"No occasion for it," was the answer, and we all went below.

Whilst undressing, I could hear Cook forward rigging out his own bed, and administering sundry punches into his pillow, for comfort I suppose. He was all the while humming to himself some nigger song or other.

"There is no happier fellow ashore or afloat," said Charlie, "than that Cook."

"Well," I remarked, "his is not a bad berth by any means."

"I don't know about that," he returned; "of course I do my best to make him comfortable in his way, but to be always aboard a yacht must be rather tiring; at least I should think so; but he does not look upon it in the same light, and I think he considers the yacht his home, and would no more care about going ashore for any length of time than I would think of flying. Well, good-night."

And after a few tosses this way and that way, we were all in the land of dreams.

When I woke up the cabin-lamp was faintly glimmering, and flickered helplessly with the easy roll of the boat. I looked at my watch—two o'clock. I got up and went barefooted to the door, so as not to wake my neighbour. All was still around us. The wind had dropped, and there was hardly any ripple on the water. The west was very dark, but in the east there appeared already a faint light proclaiming another day near at hand. It

was beautifully nice and cool then, and I sat on the deck for a few minutes looking around me. A fisherman passed me, drifting leisurely down with the tide.

"A nice day, guv'nor," said he.

"Yes, it promises well," I rejoined.

Then I asked him about birds. Plenty he had seen, he said. And with that we parted, and his brown sails soon disappeared in the haze.

I went back to my berth shivering, and was glad to re-ensconce myself between the warm sheets. Neither was I slow in falling off into a deep slumber, for the rocking of the boat lulled me to sleep wonderfully; and when I became once more aware of what was going on, I found Cook had got the breakfast things on the table, and was kicking up a deuce of a row, to wake us up I suppose.

"Half-past five!" he called out when he saw us awake.

I jumped out of bed, and went on deck to wash.

A considerable number of fishing-boats were about then, and things looked very bright and nice in the light of the new sun.

After breakfast I went ashore with Cook. He set himself to work diligently to dig for lug-worms, whilst I roamed along the flats with my gun and a dozen cartridges. A shrill whistle from Cook made me look round when I was just crossing a creek. A company of some dozen or so of shanks were on the wing, zig-zagging about over the water in all directions. I popped down into the creek and awaited their decision. They passed the creek, out of range, and were seemingly going away altogether, when three or four of them separated, and two of these coming my way, I dropped them both—two very easy shots. Picking them up was another affair altogether, and I found it beset with difficulties; for the mud was so soft that it would not bear my weight. I looked about me, and saw some old boards, which had been washed ashore by the tide. These boards I picked up, and by judiciously placing them at proper intervals in front of each other I managed to reach one of my birds. As for the other, I had to give it up, as the place where it was could not be reached without danger.

I then perceived that Cook was having a rare job at his lug-worm hunt, on account of the tide bothering him with the boat. The tide was receding, and he had to keep shoving off the boat, so as to keep it afloat, and then run to his spade and pail and resume his labour. I took pity on him, the more so as I foresaw that our provision of bait under such circumstances would be decidedly limited, and I went back to him. I then got into the

dingy, and went about with it, whilst he devoted his attention to the worms. In half an hour's time he had quite enough. I then picked him up, and we went back to the yacht. We then set sail for Deal.

We passed Whitstable at nine, and Herne Bay at nearly ten, making but little way, until a spanking breeze got up, when we literally flew past Margate with all its holiday crowds. We rounded Eastness, and turned her head due south, passing Broadstairs at twelve and Ramsgate at 1 P.M. We then had the Roads in front of us, with about three score of ships anchored there, windbound, and behind half the lot we saw Deal, with its long pier, some ten or twelve miles away.

Somewhere between three and four we anchored behind a large Norwegian barque; Charlie was rowed ashore by Cook, and went to look for our friend. The latter, however, had gone out fishing, his landlady said, but as to his whereabouts, that was more than she could tell. He had gone with the waterman he usually patronised. She knew that much, because the said waterman had called for him at her house. With that information and a box of cigars Charlie came back.

"Hand me a glass, Cook," I said to that worthy. "I will soon find out where our friend is, I will warrant."

Towards Sandwich and Ramsgate Bay there was nothing likely to be the party we were in search of, and I knew he would not be such a donkey as to go fishing right away in an open boat with the strong land-wind that was then blowing, so I concluded he was bound to be somewhere about the cliffs of the South Foreland. I looked that way. There were amidst the multitude of large craft three small boats, each likely to be the one we were in search of. One of these, however, had four ladies on board, and evidently was out for a sail, and only a sail; so that was not it. The two others were at anchor, and evidently fishing.

"Let us go down to those," I said; "he is sure to be in the first or the second."

We got up anchor and started in chase.

When we were about a mile from the first boat, I recognised our friend, and we accordingly shaped our course his way.

If ever a man was astonished in his life, it was he.

"Well," said he, "I never!"

And, in his utter astonishment, he gaped at us open-mouthed.

"Will you come aboard?" I called out, as we flew astern of them.

"Yes," said he.

"All right, then; ship your anchor, and we will heave-to."

"On second thoughts, better drop your own anchor," he then remarked; "for this is the best place for fishing."

We did as advised, and, after a chat and a glass together, we divided our forces as follows: Charlie stopped on board; I went in the dingy with Cook; and our friend resumed his former occupation with his boatman. The sea was rather unruly, which made fishing a tolerably difficult pastime to follow; but we managed, nevertheless, to bring several good fish to bag.

Cook and I worked three lines, and the whiting bit well; so much so that we never shifted our quarters. Towards evening some fisher-boats came back, with some amateurs on board, and they said that some mackerel shoals were up. They had caught two dozen on board one of these. We asked them whereabouts.

"Across the Foreland," they said.

I then returned to the yacht, and we went for a spinning trip.

There was a good breeze then, so much so that we went rather too fast; but that is because Charlie will always go at a racing pace when people are looking on; and, as the pier at Deal was pretty well studded with telescopes, glasses, &c., he thought they might be looking at us. Of course it is all vanity, for I daresay no one bothered his head about us; but it is a sort of commendable vanity which almost every owner of a yacht will exhibit when opportunity offers. And no wonder. No one likes to appear a duffer; and when a boat is actually flying, surely no one can think her crew to be a rough lot who do not know what they are about.

When we had covered another mile or so, I suggested that getting her head a little more to the wind would probably insure better sport, and we had some, but not much. I got nine fish, and that was all.

It was getting dark, at about eight o'clock, when we got up to our friend and took him in tow, much to his boatman's gratification. We anchored opposite the esplanade, and as we were to dine together we went ashore in our friend's boat, and left Cook in charge.

When we reached the shingle a good pull, a strong pull, and a pull together sent the boat a yard up on the beach; we then quickly jumped out, and, to the "calls" of the boatman, we hauled her up some fifteen yards on the high shingle, out of harm's way. That is the way landing is effected at Deal when you don't use the pier. In the time of the Romans it was the same system that was in vogue, so that the progress made in that respect appears to be decidedly slow. I daresay when a State minister or an archbishop will have been drowned in rough weather, or a lady of rank will

have got a jolly good ducking, the authorities that be will then, but not till then, perceive that a small boat harbour with an easy landing-stage, available at all times and in all states of the tide, might be built at a small cost, to the great increase and convenience of the traffic. Until then, everyone will have to submit to the primitive and picturesque style which is now perforce resorted to.

The town we found on our landing to be very quiet. There were but few bathers as yet at Deal, so that the bathing-machines were few and far between. In fact, during the day we never saw more than a score occupied at any time. When we had had our late meal we strolled about for awhile, and somewhere about 12 P.M. made tracks to the beach. Our waterman was on the look-out for us - at least, so he said; but as we found him, after many inquiries, in the bar of a public-house, his vigils must have been anything but unpleasant. We helped him to drag his boat to the water's-edge.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "jump in, if you please."

We did so, and with a shove he sent her off, and jumped in himself. Very peculiar, is it not?

Cook was on deck, smoking the calumet of peace.

"Did you order any bait, sir?" he said.

"No," we replied, in some dismay.

"Well," he said, "there is not more than half-a-dozen lugs left and half a mackerel, and that will hardly do I am thinking."

"What time do you intend starting?" inquired the boatman.

"About six," I replied.

"Well," he said, "I will bring you some bait early. I know an old man who will pick up some in the morning."

So that was arranged. He went his way, and we turned in. We were bothered part of the night by two tugs which kept at anchor near us, and whistled occasionally—in order to wake up their neighbours I presume. At 2 A.M. they each got a job in the shape of London-bound vessels, and we were left in peace between a French brig and a Norwegian barque.

At five o'clock a bump on our port side woke us up, and on going up to inquire the cause we found an old man asking if that was "the yacht as wanted bait," and on being told that we were the party he stepped on deck, and brought up a fine lot of lugs. We kept him aboard until breakfast time, and sent him away rejoicing, with a hint to give a call at our friend's and tell him we would wait for him.

The morning, however, proved as nasty as could be. A chopping sea bothered us so that fishing was almost an impossibility,

and we had, therefore, very little sport. We tried for mackerel and met with no better success.

At about ten (!) our friend turned up, looking very seedy. It seems that after leaving us on the beach at night he had met a friend, and had gone to a party in the town, never reaching his home till 4 A.M. This accounted for his wobegone appearance, but the sea-breeze soon brightened him up, and at luncheon time he "wired" into the eatables and drinkables with rare good will.

After luncheon we tried again what fishing might bring forth, but finding it decidedly dull, I said I would go shooting on the shore. I went below, got a lot of cartridges and the gun, and we got up anchor and sailed towards Sandown. The windmill there was going on in rare style, which promised our friends a jolly breeze to get along with. I was taken ashore and went my way.

Cook rowed back to the yacht, and by the time I had reached the old fort, now crumbling to pieces, they had set sail, had gone south, and were hardly discernible in the distance. I knew the sea was too rough for good fishing, and was certain that their sport would prove of the most meagre description, which indeed turned out to be the case, for, as I was afterwards told, they actually caught nothing, and even went the length of saying they had not had a bite. So much for sea-fishing with lines in rough weather.

Now, on the other hand, I have always noticed that for shore-shooting the rougher the weather the better for the guns, and this is easily understood. In rough gales the birds are tired out with holding their own against the strong wind, and are accordingly but too glad to come ashore when they can discover a suitable spot. Now, the shore between Deal and Sandwich, and in fact right round the bay up to Ramsgate, is open, bleak, and desolate, and therefore most suitable to the birds; so that there they will congregate whenever strong winds are blowing, and when there are but few people about to disturb them. On that day those two conditions were well fulfilled, and accordingly I made a fair bag. I say fair advisedly, for it is nothing to what may be done there on the very same bit of shore, in winter-time during hard weather, when the birds are plentiful and literally do not know where to settle to feed and be at peace.

I had brought a glass with me so as to be able, at a good distance, to make out whatever birds were to be seen. A wise proviso this, as the birds are in summer weather wonderfully shy, and the sooner you can set yourself about circumventing them from the moment you have made them out, the better for your sake. Now along the shores are some bleak wastes, with a high bank lining

the sea. This bank, if you use it right well and take good care to notice from some landmarks on it where the birds have settled, enables you to approach them with comparative ease. When once you are opposite to them, the rest remains with your gun and its driving powers.

When I reached the fort, there were two or three ladies and children running about barefooted and barelegged on the sands, and three men in the sea were catching shrimps, and that was all. As far as my sight could range there were no other human beings. That was a good point to begin with, and I entered into the task before me with a will.

When I had gone about a quarter of a mile without any incident worth noting, a flock of gray-plovers came over the bank, meaning to alight on the sands, I presume. I did not give them time to do so. I nailed four with the first barrel, and three with the second. That much done and the birds bagged, I reloaded leisurely and went farther. I saw, close to the water, two or three birds another quarter of a mile away; took the glass, found that they were shanks, got over the bank diligently, and went towards the spot. Arrived there I peeped over, and found that the birds were a good hundred yards from me. A moment's thought showed plainly that nothing could bring me nearer to them unseen by them, so I went down as quietly as I could, keeping the gun in a line with them and not moving it, so that the sun's rays reflected on the barrels could not frighten them. Nevertheless, they thought they were not safe, and went off before I could get near enough for even a very long shot. I wished them success, and they disappeared.

On turning again towards Sandwich, I saw two oxbirds running on the pebbles about sixty yards from me. Bang! they both rise. Bang! one falls, and the other one goes away. About half a mile farther I shot a sea-plover, and when I returned to Deal I had about a score of birds of all sorts.

At six o'clock, the yacht sent the dingy for me, and I went on board ready to enjoy a little fishing before taking our departure. The sea was much smoother then, so we set to work diligently, and having baited well, began feeling bites, and soon got a shoal around us. Evening fishing is rarely without sport, and there are several very good spots near Deal, where a fellow fond of the fun can take his fill of it.

In my opinion, below the esplanade only small fish can be got. Half a mile out in the roads, amidst the shipping, one catches middling-sized fish, with occasionally a whacker or two. But at the Point by the Foreland, that is the place for regular

large fish. The best time of the year there is in October and November, but even then there was plenty of sport to be had, and the birds in the cliffs were in shoals, so that one may fish and one may shoot there, according as his fancy dictates, with pretty fair prospects of doing well at both sports.

Late at night we parted from our friend, thanking him cordially for the timely hint he had sent us: he went back to Deal, and we turned her head homewards. At Ramsgate, however, the wind turned foul, and I had to take the train there early the following morning, much to my regret, for I had looked upon the return journey by boat as a most pleasurable treat.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend Deal to those of my brother-knights-of-the-trigger who care for shore-shooting, and to all lovers of the gentle craft who are not apt to be sea-sick. There is, in both sports, great fun to be had there.

August, 1875.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DOVER.

BEFORE parting with Charlie at Ramsgate, on our return journey from Deal, I had arranged with him that my following excursion should be to Dover; but as the journey from Erith by boat would have taken more time than I could have spared, it was arranged that, instead of sailing up the river to the boat's moorings, Charlie should turn her head southwards once more, go straight to Dover, and there await my arrival.

On my return home, I had hardly written my paper on Deal, when a telegraph boy put in an appearance with the following message:

"Dover; arrived safely. Lots of mackerel in the Channel. Weather spanky; come down as soon as you can."

Such a message, at such a time, put me in a trepidation, and it was with some pleasurable excitement that I despatched a reply, viz.:

"Coming; look out for me to-night."

When I arrived at Dover I found my friend at the station, and, after a glass, we went towards the harbour.

"When I telegraphed to you," said he, "we had just met a smack going up the Downs, Thames-bound, and it was literally loaded with mackerel: so I should think we are bound to have sport to-morrow."

We stayed ashore until midnight or thereabouts, when we wended our way to the pier.

Whilst talking to the man who had taken charge of our boat, he informed us that there were indeed very large catches of mackerel daily taking place.

"But," said he, "nets are the thing; why, with a net you could catch your boat full in two or three hours."

We explained to him that we did not want a boatful of fish, but he did not, or could not, understand us.

"Since you go a-fishin'," said he sturdily, "it is for the set purpose of catchin' fish, ain't it? Very well. Then *I* say, the more you catches the merrier; that is the way *I* looks at it. I am right, ain't I, Tom?"

The latter part of the argument was addressed to one of his comrades.

Tom took his pipe out of his mouth, expectorated, passed the back of his hand over his chin, and said:

"In course!" with due solemnity.

"But," I said, "there is no fun in fishing with a net. I like to feel fish at the end of a line, that is what *I* call the sport of the thing."

"The gentleman," said Tom, "is perhaps right."

But John did not agree, as he added, with a triumphant chuckle, that there was fun with the net when it brought "chink" into one's pockets.

This was a different affair altogether, and we left the men discussing the *pros* and *cons* of the question.

We found our beds ready, and Cook asleep; so we turned in without further ado. Save for being disturbed by the whistling of either the Ostend or the Calais steamer, both Charlie and myself rested peaceably until we heard several men speaking hurriedly in tones of alarm, and the rattle of a cable close to us. This brought us on deck in no time, and we found a yacht with a "jolly" crew just coming in, and they had nearly run foul of us, although it was almost daylight. We gave them a bit of our mind, and after a brilliant repartee conversation we turned in again, as it was decidedly cold work standing on deck in our shirts.

For another half-hour our neighbours kept up a most infernal row, plainly showing that the owner was not on board. At last they came to blows, and finally we heard a tremendous thump and a crash of crockery, followed by some remarks as to that being "a hot 'un," and a query from one of the heated combatants as to whether his adversary had had enough or not.

It was not until an hour or two afterwards that we started, when no one was to be seen on board their craft but a man fast drunk on deck, tainting the breeze with his spirited breath.

When we passed the pier we found ourselves in a very numerous company of netters, and taking advantage of a good north-easter, we set full sail for a spin before beginning our fishing operations, so as to clear us somewhat of the press of craft. It is not easy nor pleasant to spin for mackerel when a lot of boats are cruising about; so we took a cut towards Dunkirk, and actually went about ten miles across the Channel, thoroughly enjoying our

sail, ere we bethought ourselves of trying the spinners. The fact of the matter was, the weather was so lovely and the breeze so fresh that we abandoned ourselves to sailing with the wind, just for the sake of the trip.

When about ten miles from the Dover cliffs, the morning sea-fog cleared up from the horizon, and the French coast became discernible. I took the glass and saw the piers at Calais and Dunkirk, and the masts of the shipping, and when the sun shone the houses behind became visible.

"Now," I remarked, "we had better turn back, I think, and enter into the business on hand. If we keep on in this way, in two hours we shall land in France."

So we tacked, and the whiffing began. We had seen perfect shoals of mackerel on our way across, but we were too lazy to fish then. But as everything must have a commencement, we now set to in earnest, and we really had first-rate sport.

Cook and I took our stands astern, one on each side of the rudder, and by my keeping a long line and he a short one, we managed to steer clear of each other's tackle, and did wonderfully well. A bright silver spinner and a set of flies going swiftly through the water is a very pretty sight to see, and almost while Cook was remarking something to that effect, he had the first and second bites, and brought up a beauty in each case.

At last my turn came.

"Keep rather clear, Cook," I said, "I want to haul my line in."

"Got any, sir?" said he.

"Two, I think," I returned.

And I had two.

After several successive and successful casts I offered my line to Charlie.

"If you try," I told him, "you are sure to like it."

"No," said he, "thanks, I would rather see you do it. It amuses me, and I have not the trouble to haul in and to put out my line, neither do I wet my hands or my clothes; therefore, to me, looking on is more entertaining. As for you, look at the mess you are in."

But I did not mind that. I had on my fishing-clothes, and thus equipped I did not care a rap; and this, I take it, ought to be the case with every shooter or angler. Some fellows go shooting or fishing in most gorgeous attire. It makes me laugh to see them! No doubt a gold chain hanging promiscuously from one's coat is a wonderful sight, and one likely to inspire awe and respect for its owner in every *poor* beholder; but the chain catches in the gun or in the line, and is a nuisance altogether.

Then when his sporting suits cost him more than any other suit, a fellow is apt to look twice before venturing into a bog or into any sport likely to spoil his attire. This being the case, splendid sporting suits are tomfoolery. I wear my old clothes or a set of rough clothes for anything of the sort, and I am all the better for it. *Verbum sap.* Try my recipe, and if it does not influence your success in sport I shall be much astonished. You cannot serve two masters. You must give up either fashion or sport, as the two are perfectly incompatible. Don't be afraid or look afraid of criticism. Step out boldly like a man who is *proud* of his sport, and not like one who is ashamed to be seen indulging in it.

Such being the case with me, I little heeded Charlie's remarks concerning the wet state I was in.

"I believe," said he, "you would go through fire and water for sport."

"I daresay I should; but don't bother, here's another fish."

We were then getting somewhere near the English cliffs, and as it was approaching noon, and we were hungry, luncheon suggested itself.

"Put up your line, Cook," said Charlie, "and go below and see about something to eat. I am sharp set rather, are you not?"

This to me. I nodded my acquiescence in the proposal, and hinted that I was not only hungry but wonderfully "dry." Cook took the hint and brought us a bottle of Bass's ale, which we greatly relished, and of which he got his share, after which he cleared up below ready for action.

Whilst this was being done, Charlie asked which way we should go to anchor.

"Don't spoil a Folkestone fishing paper," I remarked, "whatever you do, for I want to spend a day or two there next week, and it is a good spot, too: so, if anything, I should say turn her head northward, and drop anchor anywhere you like."

Which he did, and when Cook popped his head out, and, with his face blackened with soot, told us that the chops were ready and hissing hot, we dropped anchor, got down the jib and foresail, pulled up the mainsail and reefed it, and went down at once.

The wind had died out then, and the heat was something to be felt to be believed in. We had a most pleasant hour or so over the usual smoke; but when tired of our *dolce far niente*, we bethought ourselves that another spin over the deep blue

sea would be for us the right thing to do, considering that that was why we had come down so far. The fish were not well on the feed when we had left off, and I thought I would try some natural bait. Cook, on being asked, produced strips of mackerel-skin I had given him the other day, with injunctions to coil them round some pencils and dry them. When unpinned, they stuck well to the spiral form they had acquired, and this promised good spinning. I had cut these pieces from the under part — and the most brilliantly white part — of sundry large mackerel we had caught on the previous trip off Deal, and they were now quite ready for use.

"I have never seen anything like this," remarked the man, curiously eyeing my proceedings whilst I was fixing these bait to the line, "but I think it is bound to answer very well. Of course the 'screw' in the skin will make the bait spin well, but won't the sea-water eventually unscrew those strips?"

"Never altogether," I explained. "Of course the 'screw,' as you call it, will be somewhat more open, but the effect of having got the skins well dried in that position will always affect them in some degree, at least as long as they will last as bait; for of course they go to pieces, as all natural bait will do, after some time and some service; but so long as they last they will retain their actual form pretty well."

"And do the fish like it?"

"You will see presently," I said. "There, fix some on your own tackle, and put your silver spinner in my pocket-book; now rig this on instead. Good! Let the sole-skin flies remain as they are. Is your weight right? Yes. Then go on."

I had put out my line, and he dropped his gently, Charlie tacking the boat across and across with a steady pull.

We began hauling in as fast as we could, so fast indeed, that what I had feared actually took place; ere an hour had passed, and three dozen fish been caught, we had not a strip of our bait left. I then took some bright strips off our fresh-caught fish, and this answered as well for pollack as for mackerel. But the pollack tried our tackle most severely, and gave us splendid sport, ending several times, when we both had hooked, in getting our two lines in endless and almost inextricable confusion.

"I think," said Charlie, solemnly, "that it would not be a bad plan for us to open a fish-shop somewhere at the West End."

When we had had enough of whiffing, we ran in shore, and anchored two or three miles north of Dover, in sight of the Foreland. There, as we had no lug, or indeed any other bait but the fish we had caught, we had to use bits of mackerel for "attrac-

tion." There was a boat at anchor some hundred yards from where we were, and in fact it was the sight of some fish they were catching fast that had induced us to go too, and try bottom fishing. Away then the spinning-lines were stowed, and our deep sea concerns were brought out, and two good ones selected. I baited well my three hooks—middling-sized ones, kept out and away from each other with whalebone projectors, sunk by a three-quarter of a pound lead—and soon the fun began.

Two whiting got on, as quick as British subscribers to a new Honduras loan.

Cook had gone forward so as to be out of my way, and he was silently hauling up and putting down with praiseworthy regularity and perseverance. I noticed that he placed all his fish in a large bucket, evidently with a well-meaning wish to "wipe my eye."

"So it is to be a match between us, then," I remarked to him.

"No, sir," he said, reddening in the face, and looking very sheepish, "but I thought I would like to see our respective catches kept separate."

"That," said Charlie, "is tantamount to a mute challenge. Now, fire away both of you; I will be umpire."

The said umpire entered on his self-allotted duties by swigging half a bottle of Bass's, so as to muster strength for the task before him, I presume. Thereupon I detected the villain in the act, and claimed a share in the spoils, which he duly brought to me, so that, he remarked, getting it should not interfere with my catches.

Every time one of us caught a fish he called out victoriously that the other fellow would be licked, and there rarely was a party of three men more jolly than we were.

"But, sir," said Cook, who had been for some time catching only small whiting, gurnets, &c., "how is the match to be decided, by numbers or by weight?"

"Ah!" said Charlie, taking off his hat and scratching his ear thoughtfully, "that is a knotty point—a point which requires some consideration, and I confess I am puzzled. Which shall it be?"

This was addressed to me.

"Weight," I said, "of course."

"Weight let it be then," called out the umpire.

"Then dang my lights," Cook was muttering to himself a moment or so afterwards, "I am jiggered if I don't lose."

But the way the fellow did bait was a caution.

"We shall have no mackerel left soon," I remarked to him.

"Oh!" said he, "there be several dozens yet below; and, sir, there was no stipulation as to baiting, was there, sir?" to the umpire.

"I have not heard anything about any," said Charlie.

And so we went on, baiting recklessly, and with such success that, before four mackerel had been thus disposed of, we had caught between us over three-score of fish of all sorts.

At seven o'clock we stopped, and proceeded to examine our catches. I had thirty-five fish, and had won both by weight and by number, much to my gratification and to Cook's annoyance. As a consolation to Cook, I suggested that he should try his luck with Charlie, and on my offering to stand as umpire I brought forth the rejoinder from Charlie:

"You know I rarely fish."

"Say you are too lazy, and then you will hit the nail on the head," I said.

"Very well," he returned, "I am too lazy, then; now, are you two fellows ready with your gear? The sea is getting rough, and we will be better off behind Dover Pier than here in an hour's time I will warrant."

Yes, things were looking rather squally. The sky in the east was quite black, the sea was riding rough, and a lot of craft were hastening landward to get out of the mess as soon as they possibly could. We also took the hint, and lost no time in carrying it into execution. We tumbled all our fish aft, out of the way, to be looked after at our leisure in harbour; and hoisting up our mainsail, we purchased our anchor, ran up the jib and foresail, turned her round, and there she was scudding away before the wind like a sea-gull before a hurricane. We got into harbour safe and sound, and anchored near our customers of the previous night.

When we went ashore to dine, we found ourselves at the hotel in company with a gentleman who professed himself deeply interested in sea-fishing.

"I saw you coming in," said he, "and by your load of fish I was induced to ask you for information concerning the best points about here for fishing."

"My dear sir," said Charlie, looking at me with ill-suppressed merriment, "you could not have gone to a better shop for any information of that sort. My friend here does a deal of sea-fishing, and he knows all about it."

I looked thunder and lightning at Charlie on hearing this speech. Was I to be made, thus, a living directory for the delectation of any idle man who did not know what to do with himself?

But I was equal to the occasion, and cut my friend's remarks in the bud by turning the tables upon him before he could prevent me, saying that in such matters a little practice went a long way, and that if the inquirer tried the sport he would find it good. As to the spots, he had better come with us on the morrow and try them.

This effectually riled Charlie, who did not expect *that*, and who does not care, on principle, to have strangers aboard. However, the party in question made himself so pleasant that before we left him we were glad we had met him, and he promised us faithfully an early visit on the morrow.

Early, then, on the following day we all started for a second trip, and all went well for about ten minutes. I then thought our new friend did not look so jolly as he did previously, and Cook confirmed my suspicions by quietly bringing a bucket and placing it handy-like by the side of the stranger. The latter smiled a sickly smile.

"My good fellow," stammered he, "what means this?"

But his feelings then overpowered him, and Cook pushed the bucket just in time.

"That will do nicely," quoth Charlie. "Cook, ready about."

"Yes, sir."

"Let go."

"Right."

And in a few minutes we were back by the pier, and hailing a boatman, we confided our luckless friend to his care.

The last we saw of him as we sailed away again, he looked awfully wobegone, and probably he will for a long time remember his short sail in the Channel. No doubt he would have enjoyed the sport, and would have proved himself withal a charming companion, had not sea-sickness intervened. Now it must be well borne in mind by amateur sea-fishermen that the Channel is very rarely smooth; usually the sea is always there, more or less, on the tumble. Therefore none but those with their sea-legs and with strong stomachs need try the sport there. Those for whom the sea has no dreaded terrors will find a visit to Dover one that will always be remembered with pleasure, for the fish are numerous, varied, and heavy, so that the *crême de la crême* of sea-fishing can be enjoyed there.

August, 1875.

CHAPTER XLV.

FOLKESTONE AND THE CHANNEL.

According to our arrangements, Charlie and I carried out the fishing excursion to Folkestone, but we made it a regular affair, inasmuch as we sailed straight off from Erith, instead of his sailing the boat to Folkestone and waiting there for me, as he had done for the Dover trip. The reason for this was that we had two friends who were anxious to join us, and as they are both gunners, it was thought advisable to see, *chemin faisant*, what birds were on the river. However, only one of our friends turned up at Erith at the hour of departure. We were sadly bothered thereat.

"The tide serves now," growled the skipper, "and if we delay much now we shall lose it, or the best of it, at any rate."

"I should not wait, if I were you," remarked our new companion. "Let us leave word here with the pierman that our friend had better go to Folkestone by train and await our arrival; it will be a caution for him in future."

This we forthwith carried into execution.

As is pretty well known to most Thames shooters, there is but little to be done in the way of meeting with birds before reaching the marsh at Northfleet; and when once this is passed, as there are lots of limekilns and other works established on the bank of the river, there is a corresponding noise, and there is but a small show of birds until Gravesend is passed, the Ship and Lobster left astern, and the Reach, with its shipping, is finally lost sight of.

When once, however, at Shorn, there is a likelihood of having to use the gun, but the plan is to go only about the creeks, and if you are alone the work is enough for the day; when, however, two or three fellows handy with the gun agree to take each a creek, the job is soon and well carried out, and no time is wasted.

Now, we had reckoned upon our friend joining us, when, of course, three guns would easily have accomplished all that was to be done, whereas Gervase and I thought the affair would be hard and fagging to manage by ourselves. We were discussing the question whilst drifting behind a Green ship, when—

"Yacht ahoy!" from the ship made us look up.

Two or three men were on the taffrail beckoning to us, and pointing astern. We turned round, and

"I am blowed!" exclaimed Gervase, "here is Frank in a boat!"

And so it was. There was our missing friend, chasing us in a waterman's wherry. We hove-to, and in two or three minutes Frank clambered on board, and the men handed him his carpet-bag, gun-box, ammunition, &c., after which they got a glass apiece, and then went back to Erith.

"I arrived," said Frank, "just five minutes after you had gone. So I was not going to start by train again; not if I knew it. Oh, the delight of being on a boat! The fresh breeze, the ever-changing landscape," &c. &c.

We looked at each other in amazement at this poetical outburst, and simultaneously touched our heads, and shook our noddles wisely.

"Got a crack on your skull when you were coming?"

"Yes," said he.

"Ah, that accounts for your vagaries, then."

"No; but look here, my fine fellow," said Frank, coaxingly to Cook, "have not you got anything to eat on board? I am so hungry."

"Oh yes, there is plenty to eat," said Cook, "there is a Spiers and Pond ham," &c. &c., and we left the two in great confab, until we got to Shorn, when, just as Frank was spreading his napkin over his knees, we summoned him to assist us in beating the marsh.

"Eh? What?" said he, with his mouth full, and holding knife and fork in a determined style, "shoot over the marsh? Oh yes, to be sure!"

And he actually pushed away his plate, and got up to get his gun. Few men would have given up the pleasures of the table so readily, and this enthusiasm for shooting impressed us all very favourably. It is so rare nowadays to meet with a man who is really passionately fond of sport, and ready to submit to discomfort in order to enjoy it.

Cook had the benefit of rowing us to our landing-places, and picking us up again.

The middle creek fell to my share, and as it was very early yet, and no one had gone over the marsh, I was tolerably certain that we should meet with some birds; but I did not expect a duck, and yet that was my first and only shot there, although on our coming back to the yacht I shot three oxbirds, one after the other, within half a minute or so.

As regards the duck, he was in a creek amongst some salt-water grasses. I had a Sussex spaniel with me—Rover—and although Rover does not as yet retrieve, I have good hopes of soon instilling this desirable accomplishment into him. At any rate, he deserves the trouble, being a very persevering and diligent seeker; and, untrue to his name, he does not rove, but keeps well within gunshot. Therefore, with such a companion, and with my hard-driving Tolley double 10-bore gun well loaded and ready, I felt pretty sure of nailing whatever we could find, and accordingly went on very hopefully. We had got to about a hundred yards from the shore of the Thames when Rover, who had been all the time paddling in the mud, assumed a very knowing appearance. He stopped for a moment, with his ears cocked up and his head on one side. Then he clambered desperately over some high grass and dashed ahead, when up went the duck. I tumbled it over half dead on some soft mud, where the dog went to fumble at it, without daring to kill it and without retrieving it, so I had to do both.

Frank and Gervase had not fired as yet, but they began simultaneously, and when we came to the shore we had seven birds, amongst which were a greenshank and a gray-plover. We all congregated at the same point, so as to compare bags, and to ease Cook's work. He came to fetch us, and when we got on board we found that the table was ready, so we went below and had a snack.

Subsequently we saw many birds, particularly on the soft ooze of Essex and also about the Medway, and had we been so inclined, might have made a very pleasant shooting trip there and then; but I was not going to lose sight of my intended sea-fishing excursion, and accordingly had a quiet confab with Charlie.

"Don't sail along shore any more," I hinted to him. "It only tempts us to go there and shoot. Keep in mid-channel, and let us go straight to Folkestone. We have no time to lose as it is, but when we come back we will indulge in shooting, provided my paper be written, or nearly so."

"All right," he said, and we took our place amidst the outward-bounds, who were then defiling on the Thames.

Sheerness on one side, the lightship ahead of us, and South end on our port side, with a lot of craft everywhere, was a sight worth seeing, and it greatly impressed our companions.

We passed the Isle of Sheppey at 2 P.M., and by dint of keeping on well and crowding all the canvas we could, we made capital way. Of course there was no likelihood of our seeing any shore-birds, but we caught sight of several divers and lots of sea gulls, which our friends fired at several times unsuccessfully. Both sat forward by the boom and smoked their pipes, whilst their guns were placed on deck at their feet, and well within reach. The dog sat by their side much interested in the proceedings, and thus we went on. Charlie had been up nearly all night, owing to some repairs required by the yacht, which he had superintended himself, as usual; so, feeling rather knocked up, he resigned the tiller into my hands and went below. The wind being fair, and no working required, I told Cook, who I could see was blinking away like an owl, that if he were sleepy and wished to turn in he might do so. "Thank ye, sir," said he, pulling his forelock, and he tumbled in the hatchway and was seen no more until the evening shades were over the sea.

At Deal we had a cross tide, and the deck being deluged with the boat's plunging, our two friends were driven off their vantage ground aft to keep me company. Frank is accustomed to knocking about a good deal in boats, and was of course inured to the tossing, but I was astonished at Gervase holding out so well. He had never been in a yacht before, at least never for such a comparatively long journey, and I thought he would have eventually felt sea-sick, but he did not. I had been rabbit shooting at his place in Derbyshire at the beginning of the month, and as the reading in *Bell's Life* of my trips with Charlie had interested him, he had evinced a strong desire to come with us, and that wish I had been but too glad to gratify.

When we arrived off Dover we had to get our sailing-lights up, and accordingly Cook was called to set them. Charlie then came up too in his shirt-sleeves and trousers. He gave a glance at the sails, a glance at the sea, another at Dover, and one at the Foreland, and, yawning, declared that with that wind keeping on, we ought to reach Folkestone in three-quarters of an hour.

Dover looked very nice with all its lights, and we had a good mind to run there and stop, but the sea was so quiet and the weather so lovely that it was voted we should keep at sea all night. Frank is going to India very shortly. He has lately been appointed to a comfortable post there, but means to make the most of his time in old England.

"When friends like us," said he, feelingly, "are near parting for a long time, and perhaps forever, a night spent together is not to be begrudged, and nowhere could we spend a more pleasant night than here."

So it was agreed *nem. con.* that we should keep out, and we kept on sailing, on and off, along the coast until 1 A.M. I shall always remember that night. We had sent Cook to bed after supper, and our communing then was of the most thorough description. Rarely have I had a sail with more pleasant companions and with more pleasurable surroundings. We sat on deck and talked, until someone amongst us discovered that we had entered into a new day; so we ran in shore, dropped anchor, made all snug, and all turned in except Charlie, who kept watch and then called Cook to take up his place.

At six we were all up and doing.

Have you ever, reader, found yourself on a beautiful bright summer morning at sea in a yacht, and if so, don't you think with me that it is very jolly? I do, and so said all my companions.

Well, I went ashore with the man to get some bait, and then our difficulties began, for the greatest bother in sea-fishing is, undoubtedly, the getting of proper natural bait. I am aware that artificial baits of all sorts are *said* to be as good as the natural ones. This is true, and it is not true. It all depends on what sort of fish you want to catch, and as regards artificial baits, it may be said as a very general rule, that those only answer well that are used with some degree of speed in their transit through the sea. For bottom-fishing, artificial baits do not answer very well, and it is to the enthusiastic sea-fisherman a great misfortune that such is the case, because he is thus virtually at the mercy of the natural-bait gatherers, a lazy lot, to put it mildly, at the best of times. Is there anything more likely to ruffle one's temper than to find, on arriving at a likely sea-fishing spot on the coast, that no bait is to be had for love or money, not because there was no one to gather it, but because the men and boys prefer to lounge on the pier, on the esplanade, or on the shingle, with their arms thrust elbow-deep in their enormous breeches pockets, there to coddle their knees in a fanatic sort of "Heaven-help-me" way?

There were seven other visitors besides ourselves on that day at Folkestone, who wanted to go sea-fishing. The seven individuals represented, therefore, something like £3 10s. for the day in the boatman's pocket, or ten shillings apiece; but there being no bait to be had, of course nobody went, and the money remained in the visitors' pockets. Then boatmen grumble that

their calling does not look up! Surely they could have, at least, a man among them who would make it his business to have always bait on hand. This is well done at Kingstown, in Ireland, where there are one or two professional lug gatherers, who have always a stock ready. That is how it ought to be. What is the consequence? Why, everybody almost in Kingstown takes to sea-fishing, because everyone knows that whenever the fit may take him to go out for a trip, he will always be able to get plenty of good live bait. In fact, it is the gatherers of bait who have made the town such a thorough sea-fishing spot. But the average British boatman is a proverbially indifferent animal, who does not court patronage, who surlily accepts it, and sourly fulfils his part of the contract when he gets a job, and who does but little towards enticing customers.

We had a rare job to get anything that would suit us. Mussels we found, such as they were; shrimps were also to be had, but there were no lugs and no mackerel. Imagine a seaside resort without even one mackerel!

At last a coast-guard man advised us to try a boat that was anchored somewhere opposite the pier.

"They might," he said, "have bait, or at least mackerel."

We went to them, and at last secured half-a-dozen mackerel, which they had caught with their net during the night, besides other fish, of course.

When we came back to the yacht, two hours had been thus wasted. So, without loss of time we set to work to get our lines under weigh. I gave Gervase one ready baited and rigged out, as he did not understand them, and he was the first to cast over board. I may add that he was also the first to hook.

"I have got one," said he; and he brought it up. "It is only a small eel;" and he was forthwith going to deliberately unhook it, when I caught sight of the said eel. I stopped him just in time.

"Be careful," I said, "that is a conger, and if he can lay hold of your fingers you will have good cause to remember it."

He drew back rather quickly.

"What am I to do then?" he asked.

I showed him how to proceed, and we put the conger in a bucket out of harm's way.

Frank then caught a stinger, and would also undoubtedly have got it hot from it had we not warned him in time.

"However small the fish looks, sir," said Cook, "it gives a fellow very great pain if you handle him carelessly. That is the way I treat them."

So saying, he crushed the head of the fish with his heel, unhooked it, and pitched it overboard.

Meanwhile, we had all got lines out, and the fun waxed fast and furious. Three congers came together at one time. One of these wanted to climb into the rigging, another got under a board, and the third would coil all it could of the line around its body. Rare fun it was to get all ship-shape once more after that. Then I had several very fine pouting. Frank caught two bream, each of which weighed over 3 lb.; several whiting of different sizes were also safely brought in, so that altogether the sport was most lively.

At luncheon time we gave up very reluctantly, and despatched our meal quickly. We removed farther out to sea over a rocky bottom, and after rigging a buoy to our anchor, to provide against losing it if we could not at first bring it up aboard, we cast it overboard. It caught, and when we were steady, we again began our fishing.

Now, it is astonishing how quickly salt water will destroy the best of hooks. To give an instance to the point. Whilst, during that trip to Folkestone, we were anchored in the Channel, opposite the coast-guard station, fishing at the bottom for congers, &c., we expected, as a matter of course, breaking hooks, but finally we broke so many that we had eventually to resort to an old stock I had in a box. Now, these hooks, which I had used but a few months before, were to all appearances as good and as sound as could be, only they looked rusty. I scratched one clean of rust, so that the bait could be put on easily; I then baited it, and duly let it go to try for fish. At the first bite it broke in halves. Another hook served me the same, and I wondered what was the matter with them. I tried the others with my fingers, and found then that they had lost all their elasticity. The moment I bent them they snapped bodily instead of giving way, the sea-water having corroded them so deeply that they were useless. This, of course, will only happen to small hooks. Large hooks will stand rusting, in proportion to the thickness of their metal.

On the other hand, for sea-fishing I like small hooks, at least I like them to be as small as is compatible with the size of the fish to be caught, and I think I am right there, for the smaller the hook, the more likely will a biting fish swallow bait and hook together. A large hook necessitates a large bait, and a correspondingly large mouth in the fish to swallow the lot; so that many times small fish nibble away at the bait, as they can't get it bodily into their mouths.

Some sea-fishermen claim that the larger the hook, the larger the fish caught. Of course it is so, to a certain extent; but you

may catch very large fish with small hooks, too, if these hooks are good, well-tempered, well-turned, and your tackle is strong. And as, for amateurs, the question at issue is "to catch often," I think if small hooks were tried *versus* large ones, the little ones would win the day at any time. This, of course, for amateurs. A professional who sets a long line naturally sets large hooks, so as to resist anything that may hook itself; but that is catching fish, it is not fishing. I have frequently fished with large hooks, through circumstances over which I had no control, such as losing my smaller hooks, or forgetting them, and having to use a professional's select stock, and I have invariably found that you get an awful lot of nibbles, consequently a good deal of uncalled-for trepidation, and little sport, at least to me, for I don't call catching one or two large fish good sport. I would rather catch twenty middling ones in an hour than a monster in double that length of time.

There is, however, one point to which amateur sea-fishermen, when fishing alone, will do well to pay attention, and it is this, viz. never fish for conger with two or three lines out at a time if your lines are not served with wire. If you do, you will find that whilst you are busy at one line, a conger or two will pay attention to your other lines, hook themselves, then find it unpleasant, and to solve the dilemma in which they find themselves, they will cut your lines with their teeth and go; and as they give themselves a good deal of motion they will soon get rid of the hooks as well, and feel none the worse for the experiment. I have seen one with a hook gone clean through the upper jaw, so that it only needed catching the point of the hook on a rock or in sea-weeds, in order to pull hook, gimp, and line away from it altogether, *viâ* the hole made by the hook in its journey through the jaw.

Moreover, the evolutions of a conger are astonishing and bewildering, and its ferocity proverbial, so that to handle it at all with tolerable comfort, a place must be got ready for its reception when caught, and a double-pronged sharp fork securing its head, you may then pin it on the board, thus killing it, and you may then remove the hook without fear of a bite.

We had several large crabs taking our baits during our stay off Folkestone, but only one was successfully landed. They would hold well with their claws and mouth, and allow themselves to be brought up without any fuss or bother, merely hanging at the end of the hook like so much dead weight; but the moment they were brought near the surface and caught sight of a boat, they would open their claws and let go with such rapidity, that it was marvellous to see how quickly such apparently unwieldy customers made their exit.

We had a rare stock of fish altogether, and a splendid variety of them.

We tried also whiffing for mackerel, and had several very long tacks in the hope of falling in with the shoals, but we met with scant sport, as no fish were to be had in any numbers. We only caught five or six, for what reason I cannot imagine, but perhaps the weather was too quiet for the fish to show themselves and bite well.

Nevertheless, we had a very grand day, taken altogether. There was a French or Belgian yacht cruising about, and also whiffing, but they had no better sport with their lines than we had; so they resorted to their trawl, and when we parted from them and headed due north, we left them trawling towards the French coast.

It was late when we passed Dover, and a nasty head-wind bothered us so far that we had to fetch a long way across Channel ere we could make our way good towards Deal. However, we kept under sail the whole night, and arrived at seven the next morning at Gravesend. My companions remained on board for another trip -a shooting trip this time—and I went to the pier in order to come back to town.

When I crossed the river on the ferry-boat to Tilbury, the yacht was under sail, and almost past the Reach. I inwardly wished my friends sport and success, and should have been glad to have stopped with them. When at Folkestone I had heard that several monstrous fish had lately been caught off the harbour, and also that Hythe and Sandgate, two places somewhere hard by, in the neighbourhood, were good spots for sea-fishing. At the earliest opportunity I went to visit these places; with what success I will in the next chapter let my readers know.

September, 1875.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SANDGATE, HYTHE, AND DIMCHURCH.

THERE are, probably, very few of my readers who know anything about these seaside resorts; for they are rather quiet places, and therefore they have remained comparatively unknown.

Still, to the sea-fisherman they offer in season some fair inducements, and I have during the autumn months occasionally done well there in years gone by. The sport, however, when I went there was tame. The mackerel had disappeared, and there remained but the staple fish of the station—viz. conger-eels in the rocks, and the usual fish of shingly ground. Opposite Sandgate there runs, parallel with the shore, and in continuation of the Folkestone ground, which it adjoins, a long belt of rocks, well furnished with weeds, holes, &c., in which congers and rocky fish are at all times to be found. Past Sandgate, we come to the shingle, and this goes on with but little intermission by Hythe and up to Dimchurch.

As regards general attraction, Sandgate if anything bears the palm, though it is not much of a bathing resort: but there are more people there than at Hythe; and as for Dimchurch, it is very, very quiet altogether. Strange to say, Sandgate is also the best of the three as regards sea-fishing. Generally the reverse is the case; for where a place is fashionable, it is rarely a good spot for sport of any sort.

I went to Sandgate by train from London Bridge. We had only one change, at Westenhanger, where we embarked on board a local train composed of two or three carriages. There were but few people about in the town, and I experienced no difficulty whatever in securing the services of a boatman; for there were plenty of them, and they were doing but little business. One of them was mending a net, and as this stamped him as belonging to a sort likely to give me the information I needed, I accosted him and inquired whether there was any fishing worth going for.

"It all depends," he said, "on what you expect to catch. It is not now the regular season here for sea-fishing; but of course there is always something to be got. I daresay half-a-dozen congers, some whitings, and poutings we would find, I can almost safely say, if you have good tackle and proper bait; but if it were winter-time I would show you some first-rate sport."

"I know that right well," I remarked; "but, as it is not winter-time, we had better catch what we can now and be satisfied, that is the way I look at it."

"Oh! that is all right then," he said. "When do you wish to go, sir?"

"Now, if you are ready," I replied.

"Very good, sir."

Then he called out to another man. They shoved forward a coble. I sat in it, and he jumped in just when it was leaving the shingle; and there we were, afloat on a very nice smooth sea, and with the finest possible weather to cheer us on our pursuit.

I had brought my own tackle, as usual; and, moreover, I had brought down half-a-dozen fresh mackerel as bait. Fancy bringing fish to a seaside town! Such is a sea-fisherman's shift occasionally; and, as far as I am concerned, I will never go down again on any excursion without ordering bait there beforehand, or taking some down with me. "Once caught, twice shy," says the proverb.

My man was a lively sort of a fellow, and amused me much with his remarks on the visitors, though some of his said remarks were rather hard on the unconscious spectators.

"Them town folk," said he, "are rum fish, at least, some on 'em. Now, look there, sir, at that elderly gent."

"Which one do you mean?" I inquired; "the one with the telescope?"

"Yes; that is the party. Well now, sir, does it not seem rather silly to see an old fellow like that so boyish? What does he want to look at us through a three-and-six telescope for? He can see us well enough without. But, mind you, sir, that 'ere telescope never leaves him. Early in the morning and late at night he has got it in hand or slung on his back, and every ship as passes by in mid-channel he has a peep at through it; but, bless you, it is only common glass inside the affair."

Thus talking and laughing heartily, the boatman plied his oars vigorously, and we soon reached our fishing-ground.

"Now, sir," he exclaimed joyfully, "here we are; and if you will lend me one of your lines I will lend you a hand, for I am desperately fond of catching fish."

By that acknowledgment he won my heart, and there was a bond of sympathy drawn between us.

Whilst we were getting our lines ship-shape and ready for sport, I inquired of the boatman what probable catches we were likely to make there.

"Conger and pouting mostly, sir," said he; "but when whiting do come, they come well and in force. I have caught several very fine fish on this 'ere identical spot."

I handed him my mackerel, and whilst he busied himself cutting up the bait, I put overboard my four baited hooks and let go. Two or three minutes, or more, elapsed without any incident of any sort.

"Don't you get any bites?" asked the man.

"No, not one," I replied; and I certainly thought he had been humbugging me, and had brought me to a wrong place: purposely or not I was not prepared to say, but I had an unpleasant feeling the former was the case, boatmen are so queer in their ways.

"Well, it is strange," remarked he, and he certainly looked so genuinely annoyed that I banished all ill feeling.

Meanwhile he finished his preparations rather quickly, I think, in the wish of being the sooner able to fish too: and having also baited his line, he cast it forward, and there we sat, lines in hand, feeling them for bites.

Presently he jerked his up and said:

"I had a bite, and a good one too."

Then I had a violent tug, and with a snatch, hooked, and I began hauling in.

"It is a big fish, anyhow," I remarked, and lo! when I jerked it into the stern-sheets, we both burst out simultaneously with a respective "dang it!" and "—— it!" It was a dogfish.

"That is why we could not catch anything," exclaimed the boatman: "that fellow drove the shoals away. We will have better sport now, you may depend upon it, sir."

We lost no time in getting rid of our unlucky visitor. The boatman cut its head off, unhooked it, and, according to my directions, he pitched the lot out of the way forward.

"I always used to pitch them overboard," he said.

"So do most people," I answered, but I think it is a gross mistake, simply because it becomes food for the fish, who go away in shoals after it to tear it and eat it, consequently the fishermen's boats are soon deserted. Better pitch it overboard when you have done fishing and are going ashore. Then the fish may please themselves and feed on it if they like."

"Ay, there is some sense in that," he remarked pithily, and we resumed our watch.

That time he got a bite and landed a conger. After that I hooked a whiting, lost him when nearly bringing him over the gun'ale, and hooked him again immediately afterwards, with the previous hook and snood yet on him.

A few minutes afterwards we got several coalfish as he called them; but they were only "pound" fish, and I don't think any of them weighed more, although the fisherman asseverated that two of them weighed respectively nearer two pounds than one and a half.

Of course we had the usual small fry occasionally hanging to the hooks—starfish, anemones, a few crabs, small whiting and pouting, &c.—and therefore we had pretty fair diversion in the course of the afternoon.

Towards evening the wind freshened up a bit, and when we came ashore there was a fine breeze blowing, and I wished heartily Charlie would turn up as he had promised he would. There were plenty of craft about, and I counted at one time 132 sailing vessels in the Channel!

I saw a yacht rounding from Folkestone, and thought it was Charlie's. I watched it until it had grown sufficiently stout to enable me to make it out, and I found then that I was mistaken; but as I had taken a boat to meet it, I might as well ask them concerning my looked-for friend.

"Seen a yacht anywhere?" I called out to them.

"Is it a cutter-rigged boat?" they shouted, as they flew by.

"Yes," I roared back, with my hands up as an extempore speaking-trumpet.

"All right; she is about a mile astern of us."

And by they went, with their keel nearly out of the water, and their mainmast at an angle considerably less than forty-five degrees with the surface of the sea.

Evidently they had been chased, for as soon as they understood from my inquiries that Charlie was bound to Sandgate, they shortened sail, and soon after they hove-to; they then took a tack across, probably to have a sight at their pursuer.

In ten minutes Charlie arrived, all sail set too, and looking very business-like at the tiller.

He hove-to, and I clambered on board, much to the gratification of my boatman, who evidently feared for the safety of the ribs of his craft against the sides of the lead-ballasted yacht.

Night set in rather suddenly, owing to some large, black clouds invading the sky.

"Dirty night," soliloquised Charlie; "we will run into harbour, or look out for squalls."

The other yacht evidently thought the same, and we had a rare spin with them to Dover, where we arrived at 11 P.M., very tired and very hungry.

Some people wonder how it is that sailors are generally endowed with such rare appetites. Some say the sea-air is the cause of it. Partly so, perhaps; but I think that the fact of being on board a vessel, entailing as it does a continual motion of the muscles of the body in order to maintain one's equilibrium, causes necessarily a considerable waste of the tissues. Now, this waste must be repaired by food, and hence the strong appetite of men who may appear to be doing nothing for it all day. I am certain that a fifteen-mile tramp in the fields after partridges, or a twelve-mile flounder in a bog after snipe, does not tire me more than a fifteen-hour sail on a moderately rough sea. After either I am equally hungry; and as on board the yacht I do very little, evidently the motion of the boat must be accountable for both the fatigue and sound appetite I experience there. If anyone has a better explanation to give of the fact, I will be most thankful to hear it, and will take it as a personal favour to receive the information early. If my hypothesis is right, it is clear that those sailors who have to work hard on board must waste tissues considerably, and therefore they must need a proportionately larger amount of food than men who are at work on *terra firma*.

What confirms me in this opinion is, that no one could believe what an amount of food it takes to keep Cook well and hearty. Now, Cook, I take it, is as fair a sample of a hard-working sailor as is to be found anywhere on the face of the globe: and no one who has not seen it could believe what an amount of food that fellow can put out of sight, and look all the better for. Half-a-dozen pollack, two or three whiting, and a pouting or two—more or less—"chucked in," as he terms it, besides a couple of pounds of steak and an enormous load of potatoes, constitute what he sedately calls a snack, or a "bit" of supper.

"If that is a *bit*, Cook," I remarked to him on the evening in question, after he had declared to us that "he had cleared all the fish," &c., "I should like to know what you call a real square meal."

"Well," said Charlie, "I will tell you what he did once, when we won a cup at a regatta. There was on board at the time an eighteen-pound turkey, besides other eatables, as I expected some friends; but, as it turned out, I was invited to a grand set-to at the club, and went accordingly ashore, leaving Cook in charge, with

directions to enjoy himself *ad libitum* with the provisions. When I came back early in the morning, I found him asleep in his bunk, but the turkey was gone, all but the bones."

"Yes, sir," here interposed Cook, "I remember that turkey very well," and the fellow ludicrously smacked his lips; "I had two 'goes' at him; one at eight o'clock, as soon as you had left, and the other at about eleven. He was a nice bird, *he* was."

But fancy, eating in two sittings an eighteen-pound "bird," as he called it. That promises well, for he is but young yet, is Master Cook, and when he reaches forty, if he keeps on in that line, he will be a caution to boarding-houses, and no mistake.

I shall never forget, five or six years ago, when I went to Boulogne with Charlie, how Cook behaved in the kitchen of the hotel where we had put up. Charlie, thinking he would treat Cook to a little foreign style of cookery, had commissioned one of the waiters to see after that worthy's comforts, and give him a good dinner. The two went below in the kitchen, and I shall never forget the looks of the waiter when he came up again.

"Your young man," said he, "is *insatiable*. He did not care for *potage*, and said that each of our steaks was but a mouthful. He has had six now, and I think he has not had enough yet."

Subsequently we heard Cook, when we got back on board, grumbling to the other man (we had two then) as to his experiences of French living, and he summed up his ideas thereof in the following pithy manner:

"It is awfully nice, Tom, you have no idea; but there is so little of it! Why each of their steaks is about the size of a half-a-crown piece! I kept the fellows running for some more, I can tell you. But all the same I am hungry now, and I wonder how those foreigners can live on such short rations!"

This little digression over, I return to our trip. At Dover we procured shrimps, mussels, and herrings (such as the latter were, not remarkably fresh, but as none other were to be got we had to be content), and by 12 P.M. we were all in bed.

The wind kept whistling in the rigging for a good while, and the boat tossed so much, that for the first hour or so it was to me next to impossible to sleep. Then a steamer came in, whistling and roaring like thunder; a lot of porters ran to and fro on the pier with lamps in their hands, and shouting here and there. Then the train took its passengers off, the steamer blew off its steam, much to our annoyance, and at last we had peace.

I woke up late, and found breakfast ready.

This meal discussed, we consulted together as to the probabilities of our having any sport out.

"If this wind is likely to rise," I said to Charlie, "it is of no use whatsoever our getting under weigh, for I know the coast well, from here to Dimchurch. It is a large open bay, with no shelter and no harbour. We should toss too much to fish, and could run nowhere out of the way if it came squally, so unless you think it will eventually break up we had better stop where we are."

We went to the barometer. It was rising, and continued doing so for half an hour, so we purchased our anchor and started.

As I had tried Sandgate the day before, we sailed to Hythe straightway.

A queer-looking place is Hythe, with its hills and straggling houses, its railway station "on the top of the monument," or at least quite as high if not more so, and right out of everybody's way, as most railway stations are. Behind the town, or village, or burgh, or whatever it is, rose the high hills, covered with sheep and a few cattle. In front, along the shingle, past the houses, were the military towers, marking, I think, the targets where the soldiers practise their rifle-firing. Rather awkward to the visitors this firing must be, by-the-way, for the targets are placed near the sea-shore, so that all bullets fired a little too high necessarily must be spent in the sea; and if anyone should venture on that part of the beach just then, he might get an ounce odd of solid lead into his head, and that might prove a "little" too much for the strongest amongst us. Of course all the inhabitants of the town are aware of the state of the matter, but visitors are not, and cannot be supposed to know until told.

Of the fishing itself, I cannot speak very highly. There are no rocks there, the belt stopping by Sandgate, so that no congers are to be had, and rock-fish are necessarily scarce. We only got small fish, much to our disgust, and we therefore ran down Hythe with a vengeance amongst ourselves. No sands fit for a Christian to walk upon, all rough shingle, a precipitous and therefore treacherous shore, *i.e.* the holes are sharp and sudden in the shingle, and if you don't look out when bathing you may be upset, head over heels, by a wave into a deep hole, and if you can't swim, there you are, a "gone coon." Then there are no birds to be found, and, for the matter of that, why should they go there? The place is as bare as a billiard-table, and I don't believe there is a grub to be had on it for miles. Then query, since the bathing is not particularly safe or agreeable, since the walking is unpleasant, since there are no fish, or very few, to be caught, and there are no birds to be seen, what can induce people to go to Hythe? This is to me a mystery. The only thing that can

recommend it is its quietness, and to tell the truth that quietness is not likely to be disturbed.

We fished until 2 P.M. with indifferent success, as, barring two or three fair-sized fish, we caught but a lot of rubbish, at least I thought so.

Cook says the smaller the fish the nicer the taste. Probably so. But still, there is a limit to smallness, and being too small is not a recommendation by any means.

At two o'clock we lunched, and immediately after we set sail, and headed due west for Dimchurch.

We gave a wide berth to the before-mentioned targets as we sailed by, and in an hour's time we had covered the six miles that intervene between Hythe and Dimchurch. Past the targets, a stone wall has been erected along the sea from the old fort to the village, and I looked well beyond that sea-wall, but I could discover no signs of lapwings or other birds likely to congregate in a marsh. From this I guessed the spot to be probably a poor one for sport with a gun.

Our sail was uneventful, and we anchored off Dimchurch without any incident whatever. We soon got our gear in trim. Cook went into the dingy to fish more comfortably, he said, but he did not get better fun than I had, and that was on a par with the sport we had at Hythe. All were small fish, pouting and a few whiting, a pollack by some wonderful chance, and that was all.

"It is no good wasting more time," I suggested, when we had tried four or five different anchorages; "let us get away now before it gets dark."

Cook then wound up his lines, pitched all the remainder of our bait overboard, came aboard, and we weighed our anchor.

Thus ended our trip as far as the sea-fishing was concerned, for although I "railed" for anything that might choose to bite whilst we were on our way back, I caught nothing after an hour's trial, so I "shut up shop" and went below to dinner.

Off Hythe we found a boat or two out, and I spoke to the men. They all agreed that the fishing either at Hythe or at Dimchurch was never good then, but that in a month or two good sport might be expected. We then left them, and soon passed Sandgate, then Folkestone, and an artistic tack brought us safe and sound within Dover's shelter somewhere about eleven o'clock P.M., not much elated at the sport we had obtained, but very pleased with our trip on the sea.

September, 1875.

CHAPTER XLVII.

YARMOUTH.

YARMOUTH is one of the queerest and most interesting places the tourist can visit, and the Yarmouth Roads in season afford brilliant sport in sea-fishing. When I went, however, and that was in September, the sport was rather indifferent. Where the fish might have been was a troublesome problem for the boatmen to solve, and this being the case, good creels were few and far between, and it was only by sheer luck that anything worth noting was brought to bag.

And by-the-way, lest I should forget to chronicle the event, I will state that a lobster measuring fourteen inches was caught off the mouth of the harbour by the lighthouse-keeper, with an ordinary line, baited with mussel or herring. Catching lobsters with *loines* (as Yarmouth folk call them) is a rare feat, and I have only once performed it. Well, this lobster was the talk of the few amateur sea-fishermen who had then made Yarmouth their head-quarters, and several enthusiasts, on the strength of the lighthouse-man's exploits, plied their lines on and off the pier, in the hope of emulating his memorable deed, but with scant success. I had tried my hand at it previously from the South Head, and had found but meagre sport, though I used every available bait.

I may state that bait is not very readily obtainable at Yarmouth, and—note ye this, intending sea-anglers—if you don't hunt out somewhere in the "Yarmouth Gridiron" a shop where you can order your commodities beforehand, you will have to do without, if you trust to finding some there at the last moment. The best places to bestow your patronage are those where a board is exposed to public gaze, setting forth with abbreviated spelling, that "live and boil'd shrimps are sold here." "Them is the shops," as Cook says, where you can have your wishes duly attended to. But if, like my innocent self, you trust to Norfolk

insouciance to get your bait, then you will have to forego your fishing for the day, at least.

It is really astonishing how indifferent the whole Yarmouth population seems to be towards the everywhere-else-worshipped potency of silver currency. If in London you were to offer a street-boy sixpence to get you anything imaginable, from a cab to a wheel-barrow, he would rather break his neck than not try, at any rate, to discover those conveyances; but in Yarmouth, whether it be apathy, stolidity, or stupidity, a boy to whom you apply for the information "does not know" where he may get bait, and if he does happen to know, "does not think" that he can get any there.

Then the shrimp boats are the most extraordinary ubiquitous craft it has ever been my lot to fall in with. Whenever you ask for live shrimps for bait, the shrimp-boats are always out just then.

"When will they be in?"

"There is no knowing."

With this comforting piece of information you go out for a walk, and lo! all the shrimp-boats, which were not expected by anybody, are now turning up, one after the other, in Indian file, as is the wont of all professional sea-fishermen who engage in the same pursuit; though why, I know not. It does certainly, to the uninitiated, seem queer that because Jack, Peter, and Bill have caught enough shrimps to justify their coming home, the remainder of the shrimp-fleet should follow their example, whether the said remainder be empty-handed (or nearly so) or not. Well, you would think as I did, when you catch sight of the said boats coming into harbour, viz. that you would have only to holloa to one of them to get your needful in exchange for a sixpenny-piece or a shilling. But you would again be *sold*.

"Shrimper, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay," the shrimper replies, whilst he remains lying at full length in his boat with his head just visible near the tiller.

"Can you let me have a handful of live shrimps? Of course I will pay you well for them."

"Can't stop," he returns laconically, and he turns his head back again to its former position, the very picture of a man to whom the treasures of *la toison d'or* would offer no inducement to alter his course a single point.

Happy Yarmouth shrimpers! may this indifference serve you well and long. But, by Jove! it is lucky you don't happen to belong to London or its neighbourhood. If you did, you would have to wake up, I am afraid, and *that* might upset your stolid equanimity.

From all this, my readers will perceive that getting bait at Yarmouth is tantamount, when you don't know how things stand there, to a wild-goose chase.

As for herring, one can get plenty of them at the wharves, but they are dreadfully salt, and this makes them not such good bait for fish as fresh herring or fresh mackerel. However, herring and shrimps are the staple bait in Yarmouth. There are lugs on the sands and on the flats of the Yare, but no one digs them out. On the timbers of the harbour-piers at low-tide mussels are to be got, and pretty fair ones too, but then one has to watch for the tide, or else to commission some man at the pier-head to get them.

Then, when you have all you want, the question arises, where am I to go? The piermen say the pier is the best just then. The boatmen, on the other hand, asseverate that in the Roads there is a good deal more sport to be had; so, in order to ascertain the truth, you have to try both.

I did, and I moreover tried within the harbour, and on the Yare, past the bridge.

My first trip was intended to be out to sea, but the sea itself put a stop to that excursion on the first day, as it was too rough to try hooking. I therefore tried the mouth of the harbour, fishing from the pier-head. The wind was N.E., very strong. I hunted out along the timbers, and found a fine shelter on the south pier. I got a line in order, and was baiting it when several *habitués* congregated around me to watch the sport. First I caught a crab, then I had several nibbles, and got my bait taken away. That was a good sign; on my next attempt I caught a coalfish, about a pound and a half in weight, and owing to the height at which I stood he gave good play. The line, moreover, caught in some splinters on a timber whilst I was bringing up the fish, and I had to let go the fish and lead, so as to unhook the line from the pile. In doing this I nearly lost the fish, much to the trepidation of the youthful members of my gallery, who had crowded very close round to have a look at him. At last up he came, and he was scarcely in the creel when more than half-a-dozen lines were out, with as many anxious amateur fishermen trying their luck. But oh Fortune! these are thy strokes! Neither of us even caught so much as a sprat, and after trying another hour I gave it up in despair, wound up my line, and made tracks for dinner.

Bad day's sport.

The next day being quieter, I went in a boat.

"Towards the Sands Lightship," said one of my boatmen, "we shall catch flat-fish and whiting."

We anchored within a couple of hundred yards of the ship, and forthwith began operations. We stopped two hours and a half there, and the whole catch was not above a score, and consisted chiefly of whiting and gurnet.

I had brought some lunch with me, but I did not fancy lunching, somehow, so we tripped our moorings and went northway, in front of the beach, until we had left Yarmouth some mile or so behind us.

Opposite the north battery the surf broke rather white over the sand-banks; but where we were the said sand-banks protected us somewhat against the unruly waves of the German Ocean.

Whilst we were fishing, or rather trying to catch fish, we had a splendid view of the town and of the neighbourhood, but the sport was not very interesting. Near us were two gentlemen fishing from a boat, and, like me, they were catching next to nothing. A few miserable gurnets, a paltry starved whiting or two, a pollock in a galloping consumption, a ravenous crab or so—which tribe is always hungry, and will nibble away at any bait, no matter what it is, digestible or otherwise, salt or fresh, new or old—and that was about all, so no wonder I began to feel rather dreary when I had had an hour of it.

My neighbours, perhaps on the Cockney principle of sea-sickness being a fine treat, stopped where they were until they were both sick, after which they went back, and shortly after we followed in their wake.

The ground was, by-the-way, infested with dogfish. I caught two of these diminutive sharks, and, like jealousy, they certainly were green-eyed monsters. I do not think you could find anywhere a more diabolical expression than you notice in the eyes of dogfish as soon as you jerk them into your craft. Their whole countenance, so to speak, is fiendish in the extreme, and it is no wonder they drive all other fish away—they are ugly enough for anything. The larger of the two I caught was barely more than two pounds in weight, yet he looked all over a monster to be dreaded. My men were very cautious in handling either of them, and I did not blame them either.

When I landed once more in the midst of the gay throng it was getting on towards dusk, and I had had enough of the sea for the day, so I declined my men's proposal that in the evening they should take me for a moonlight row, whilst the militia band would be playing on the Wellington Pier.

The next day was again nasty, there being a short, chopping sea, and a dark sky that boded no good. I remained on shore, walked to the ferry, got over to Gorleston, and there, whilst

loitering along the wharves, ships, and warehouses, I spied two shrimp-boats drawn up against the shore.

Now, be it known that wherever shrimp-boats anchor, flat and other fish, crabs, &c., will always congregate, not that they are fond of the craft, but simply because when the men shake their nets, or hang them up to the masthead to dry, a lot of small shrimps, dead or alive, are knocked therefrom into the water, and the fish come there to eat that refuse. This being the case, you can always depend upon having pretty fair sport near the shrimp boats, and I, therefore, very sensibly sat down on a log in front of the two boats, and getting a line under weigh I baited with two shrimps, and cast it right between the two crafts. Nibble, nibble, nibble! Up I go with my hand, and number one is evidently on the hook. I haul him in, a fine flounder. That will do, nice sport this.

But, alas! for human expectations; "Wildfowler" proposed, but the Gorleston and Yarmouth urchins disposed. No sooner was my catch witnessed, than, from goodness alone knows where, there sprang forth a tribe of sturdy little boys, each of whom, somehow, had a line in his pocket. As the boys had quite as much right to be there as I had, there was nothing to do but bear their presence, which I would have done cheerfully had they pursued their calling with the proverbial dumbness inherent to the sport. But they did not. They screeched, and sang, and tumbled everywhere and over everything, excepting into the water, from whence I was in momentary expectation of having the job to pick up one or two of them.

At last my patience gave way, and I went, leaving them in possession. Whenever I passed that way afterwards, there were always a dozen or so of anglers hard at work at the sport, whether the shrimp-boats happened to be there or not!

Such is fishing in the harbour at Yarmouth. As soon as you begin, if you seem to have luck, a shoal of anglers crowd around you, and farewell to sport.

The only way to obviate this is to take a boat—brilliant idea, no doubt; but also with its drawback in this way, that the harbour is rather narrow, the traffic considerable, the tugs very unruly, and the inconveniences to which anglers are put neither few nor far between. As an instance to the point, when I was there fishing, the very identical two gentlemen who were my neighbours at sea were also there in a boat, and of course they were fishing. All went well for half an hour, when, barring a severe toss up and down, caused by the swell of a tug, we managed to get on tolerably well; but at last there came the straw that

broke the camel's back. My neighbours somehow got foul of a tug, or else the tug got foul of them; anyhow, the elder of the two gentlemen was hit on the temple with one of their oars, which was jerked by the tow-rope against his face; he was knocked down all of a heap to the bottom of his boat, whilst his young *confrère's* hat was jerked overboard, and they eventually had to row after it. After the first shock was over, strong language was used on both sides, with good ground I think on my neighbours' part, for after all, when a fellow is quietly fishing, to be ill-used in that way is certainly enough to make him swear, I know.

Howbeit, vengeance was vowed on one side, and defied with lofty independence on the other; the captain or commander of the tug declined to walk ashore to get his head well punched, as the two irate anglers expressed their dearest wish to treat him to, much to my boatman's grief, for he anticipated a rare lark out of the mill, as the combatants were both pretty well wound up by that time.

However, everything has an end, and so, when the tug had gone, the two fishers resumed sport; but they were upset, morally as well as physically, and they soon went.

"Sir," said one of them to me as they passed, "you saw the whole affair. I have a good mind to prosecute the fellow. I have noted down the name of his vessel, and besides, I am not likely to forget it in a hurry. But, by jingo! I would give a trifle, even now, to have him yonder in the downs for a quarter of an hour; I would teach him not to run down a craft that he knows is weaker than his own.

And they went away fuming.

I remained fishing at the same spot for a good while, and caught about a score of fish, principally flounders and eels. One of the eels was a good two pound fish, the others were smaller. It was very good fun for awhile, but when the tide receded the sport abated, and when I had been a quarter of an hour without feeling a bite or even a nibble, I concluded that the "play was over," and I had better whistle "God Save the Queen."

This I did, and my boatman took the hint very readily. We packed up fish and lines, and this ended, for the time being, my trial of the sea fishing at Yarmouth. It was not, as my readers will perceive, any sport out of the common, but just what one could expect then—only a few staple fish, and that was all.

In a few weeks, however, the codlings would be "all there," and then there would be fun to be had at Yarmouth in the sea-fishing line. I have caught there, in two hours, more fish than I could

carry, and I can carry a tidy load when I have caught it myself. If then, any brother-fisherman cares much for the sport, I will recommend him to take up his quarters there in, say October or November, and for the sport then I will answer.

As regards fresh-water fishing, there is also a deal to be had about Yarmouth, and I have myself done very well indeed on the Broads and on the river in the small-fry line; but as I find my paper running short, I must now wind up my running "cackle," and put off to another chapter the narrative of my excursions to the Fritton Decoy, to Buckenham, to the Mutford Broad, and on the Yare. Till then, fare-thee-well, friendly reader.

September, 1875.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SHORE SHOOTING, FRESH-WATER ANGLING, AND SEA FISHING NEAR YARMOUTH.

In "Sea-fishing Excursions," I have related what sea fishing proper I had enjoyed at Yarmouth during the first period of my stay there; but, as I also went to most places of interest to the tourist-sportsman round about Yarmouth, I will enter into the details of these sundry excursions, and I think they cannot fail to interest my readers.

Of course, this narrative will be an *olla podrida* of sport, comprising as it does well-nigh every sport then obtainable in Norfolk and Suffolk. As it was very aptly remarked by the witty writer of the leading article which appeared in *Bell's Life* on the 25th Sept., 1875, on the subject of my "Sea-fishing Excursions," there are but too many seaside *villéggiateurs* who spend their holidays with as much wilful disregard of the sea as if they were still in town. Being crammed all the afternoon and evening in a dusty billiard-room may be, by some, thought *de bon ton*, but that style of thing has no charms for a sportsman, and it has none for me. Not that I do not like billiards. When it rains hard and there is nothing else to be done, you should just see "Wildfowler" in his shirt sleeves, getting up his score like steam (when the balls favour him, and he is in his usual slice of luck). But when the weather is tolerably fine, and there is any sport to be had, then it would take a good deal of persuasion to convince me that I should be happier in any other places but those dear to my hopes and disposition. Now, the neighbourhood of Yarmouth is one of those favoured spots where there is always, for a sportsman, a good deal to be done, but I will leave my readers to judge of that from a perusal of my peregrinations. At any rate, they will perceive that a fortnight was very fully employed.

Of course, I had brought down a gun—I never go anywhere without one.

Well, the first week of my stay was well-nigh fully spent at sea fishing, and my experience thereof was not particularly remarkable, owing to the early season.

I now enter into the last portion of my time. I had been, I think, five days in the place, and on the next day, waking up early, I chanced to hear the pitter-patter of a drowsy Scotch mist on the panes of my windows. Upon looking out, the sky appeared wonderfully gray and dull, and the mist looked as though it meant to last for a month.

"Lovely morning, this," I thought, "for a tramp along the river Yare."

I looked at my watch—four o'clock. I dressed in a rough suit of clothes, over which I donned a long-cloth waterproof; I took out cartridges, gun, &c., and went out without waking anybody.

Yarmouth was, as may readily be imagined, very quiet as yet; barring a few sailors going towards the harbour, two or three stray dogs, and a policeman near the station, that was about all I saw on the move.

I soon made my way over the bridge and along the river, when I found a strong wind blowing from the north-east, and therefore directly in my face, as I trudged along the wall of the Breydon Water. The tide was high, and on the turn. I met a yachtsman near the building-yard, and asked him about the flats.

"The tide," said he, "will run down fast now, and if you wish to have sport you must go leisurely along. The flats along shore will be soon bare, and you will find the birds there, if you look out."

I thanked him cordially, and went my way. By that time I was seemingly in a perfect vapour bath, and the number of swallows that congregated over the wall, and flew here and there, catching insects on the wing, was something astonishing. Rain, in summer weather, always brings out a lot of grubs and flies, and the birds enjoyed the treat immensely, if I were to judge from their joyful cries and lively evolutions. But, all the same, when you are on the look-out for sandpipers, oxbirds, &c., it does give a fellow a start to get suddenly a swallow or two jumping up from no one knows where, and skipping swiftly over the water. Many a time did I clutch the gun in anticipation, when thus suddenly startled by these and by other small birds, which were there very numerous.

When I had passed the floating timbers, and entered into the *bonâ-fide* business on hand, I perceived, a hundred yards or so from me, a stile, and near the stile, on a level with the bank, were two dark spots.

"Watchers for ducks," I thought, and in this I was right.

One was a sailor-looking man, with a single-barrelled large-bore muzzle-loading gun; the other was an elderly man of the class one would call gent. He had also a muzzle-loader—a double gun—and when I arrived near them, they were "taking a drain."

Asking them about the sport they had obtained, they shook their heads woefully.

I went on, and had my first shot very soon after; for, out of the ditch which lines the bank on the left, as you go towards Burgh Castle, rose a sandpiper, which I floored directly. Then a flock of lapwings came over the bank, and I gave them the benefit of both barrels at close quarters, which performance I knew would bring no wounded, on account of the short range. Eight birds fell like lumps of lead, the shot having gone through their ranks like the scythe of Death itself. Some of the birds fell on my side of the ditch, others in it, and two on the other side. The ditch was too wide to be passable, especially as there was no room for a sprint; and I had made up my mind to leave the off-side birds where they were, when a cowherd, who was watching me, came up and pitched them over to me. I, in return, threw him a sixpenny-bit, and he was so pleased that he said he knew of a snipe in a ditch. Would I shoot it? Of course I would. We went. It was a jacksnipe. I had loaded with dust-shot in his honour, and he came to grass very handsomely. Boy thereupon gets another bright sixpence, and looks as pleased as Punch.

"There be a fine marsh near the lime-works," says he, "but the Vicar of Burgh Castle has the shooting over it, and he don't like strangers, he don't."

With this cheering information I resumed my tramp. I had not been long going when I heard several curlews calling, and saw them. They were coming leisurely from the east side of the river, where a train on the Great Eastern line was then passing, and probably this train had driven them away from their feeding-ground. I stood still, with only my eyes and the top of my head above the level of the wall, and watching them, I saw them swoop down towards a flat near the bank behind which I stood. I marked the spot carefully, and made my way there with all speed, meanwhile extracting my small-shot cartridges, and substituting in their stead larger shot cases. When I peeped steadily over the wall they were there, and never seemed to notice me. A half-dozen of them being nearer to me than the others, I devoted all my attention to them. They were feeding very leisurely, and stalking with great gravity over the flat. When I had first looked they were about a hundred yards away from the shore, but within a few

minutes they were some ten yards or so nearer. Still, it was slow work; and I then perceived that, if they kept on going in the direction they were taking, they would soon get as far again as ever. By good luck, however, one got up and flew towards me, intending very probably to alight on the softer mud near the bank, but I did not give him time. I pulled and smashed him, when, to my astonishment, a heron rose close to the wall. Of course he had been, all this while, closer to me by far than the curlews; but I could not see him, as I had been obliged to proceed so very quietly, and had not yet been able to look boldly from the top of the wall. Howbeit, on these damp mornings the smoke of gunpowder hangs long and heavily in the atmosphere, and what with this impediment, and what with my astonishment, I believe I missed the heron altogether. Anyhow he went his way, and the curlews disappeared as if by magic. My dead one, however, was there on the "soft," but how to get him without causing a coroner's inquest to be held subsequently over my body I did not know, as I had no mud-shoes. However, a man who was hard by, spearing eels from a punt, came to my signal, and he managed to pick it up with his paddle and hand it to me.

"Have you caught many eels?" I inquired.

"About two stones weight," he said.

"Then there are plenty here?"

"Oh yes, there are," he said; "would you like to try it?"

Nothing could have pleased me better; but his punt being too small, I could not just then get in with him. But I made up my mind to have a little go at spearing, and I arranged to go with him on the morrow, when he would get a larger punt on purpose for the trip.

This being arranged, he resumed his spearing, and I resumed my shooting.

A pleasant-looking grazier, who stood at a gate, then came to me, and said he knew of a sandpiper in one of his ditches, and asked me to go with him and shoot it *if* I could. I went gratefully, but no sandpiper was there. However, the worthy farmer took me a good round over his marsh to see if we could find another, or a snipe, but there was nothing to be seen. In winter-time, he said, it would have been different. I therefore asked him for fuller particulars, and, eventually we became good friends, and we made arrangements for an expedition, the following November or December, over his farm and his friend's. I need not add that I looked forward to that trip with some pleasure, as probably it would be just such an excursion of which a narrative would delight any shooter's heart. But of this more by-and-by. Any-

way I had, there and then, free leave given me to shoot over the marsh, and had I had more time to spend over it, I probably should have made something of it, although at that time of the year nothing much could reasonably have been expected.

Soon after leaving the farmer, I saw some starlings settling on the shore. I went towards them, and when I got up the bank I caught them and a lapwing quite unawares. I floored the tufted bird first, and brought two "chatterers" down with the other barrel. I then walked up the hill towards the village, Burgh Castle, and entered an inn. I had had as yet no breakfast, and wanted it badly, so I made myself comfortable, preparing to enjoy two or three eggs, bread and butter, a slice or two of ham, and coffee *ad libitum*.

Well, after waiting a minute or so, and no one appearing, and no bell being visible, I ventured to call out, when the landlady came in no hurry. I made known my wants.

"We don't cook for anybody," she said.

I thought my ears were deceiving me.

"Eh, what did you say?"

Then she repeated that they prepared no meals in the house except for themselves.

"Well, but this is an inn, is it not?" I inquired in utter astonishment, and, may I add, dismay; for it is no joke to have walked some ten miles on an empty stomach, and have then the perspective of having to walk back five more miles before getting a bite. Hang it!

Yes, oh yes, it was an inn, safe enough, but all the refreshments they dealt in were beer and biscuits.

I was staggered! I took stock of the old girl from head to foot with polite, but unspeakable and unutterable, contempt.

"Call such a house an inn!" I thought, "then, what is a pothouse?"

I left, I think, in anger; and if ever I am caught again within the walls of that inn may I be blessed, that's all!

I retraced my footsteps, brooding moodily over the state of affairs; wet, hungry, muddy, and angry, that was not, taken all in all, very cheerful. I met, on the road near the church, a very pretty servant girl coming from the rectory, and had a good mind to send by her my compliments to her master, and the request of an invitation to breakfast (cool, was it not?); but the wench and I were alone, and as I suddenly thought that if I spoke to her she might take it into her head to cry out and give me in charge for some imaginary offence, I stalked on to the other side of the road, giving her as wide a berth as possible, which made her laugh, bless

her heart! But if she had known how hungry I was, and how anxious to leave the village, she would not have laughed, I am certain.

I shall always remember Burgh Castle, and if ever I have any money to bequeath, it will not go to the innkeeper, or his wife, or anything or anybody that is his. Starved! In one of the best English counties, and with money in one's pockets! It is hardly credible, is it? Yet that is the plain fact—I was starved. Now, it is astonishing what a difference it makes in the way one looks at things, when it is done with a full stomach or with the reverse. I never, in all my born days, as old Joe used to say, saw such a gloomy landscape as the one that met my sight when I descended once more in the marsh by the sea-wall.

But there, it is all over now. However, I was so wild that I fired at everything coming my way on the return journey. I bagged a redshank, an oyster-catcher (it had been wounded previously, I think), and several oxbirds; and when I arrived once more near the farmer's house, I thought I would go in and have some breakfast there; but I was wet and near the town, so I resolutely set on, and soon got home, when a thorough change, a wash, and a meal put me on good terms with myself and all around.

The next day, punctually at 8 A.M., my eel-spearer made his appearance, and we went together towards his craft, which he had moored near one of the timber-yards. There was a fair wind, so he hoisted a triangular sail about the size of a table-napkin, and we slid along "fine." The punt was deck-covered and very roomy, notwithstanding that it drew but two or three inches of water, and I enjoyed the sail very much indeed. I had brought my gun, my rod, and two lines, with bait of sundry sorts, as I meant to make a day of it, and I knew that several pursuits would make all things go off in a far more interesting manner.

I had no occasion to use the gun until we reached the green marsh, where two sandpipers came in for a share of pepper. The tide was going down, and as soon as the water was low enough the man declared it was time to begin operations. He had a five or six pronged spear with a six-foot handle, which he forthwith proceeded to put into action. He stood astern, and with his sleeves tucked up, and a fish-box ready for the reception of his slippery customers, he began. Thrust! went the spear, in rapid successive strokes in the mud, and at the sixth thrust he brought it in, with a fine eel wriggling in the barbs. He knocked it off into the box, and went on again. Now, I noticed that for each thrust he gave, the subsequent pull of the spear out of the mud had the

effect of drawing the punt forward, so that each new thrust was effected in a different spot. Very good dodge this, which of course these professionals are clever at performing, but which nevertheless, however easy it may appear to the uninitiated, requires considerable experience to put in practice with anything like tolerable uniformity and safety.

Thus, when *I* attempted to do it I sometimes pulled too hard, and thereby pulled the punt too fast; or else I pulled too soft, and then we went too slow; then I stuck the spear, and nearly went overboard; finally, I very nearly upset our concern altogether. The man, however, only laughed at my awkwardness, and he was evidently highly tickled at the unsuccessful attempts of his fare to emulate his deeds.

However, I had made up my mind to at least catch one eel, and I stuck manfully to my self-imposed task until I had performed it. I ultimately caught one about the size of a large pencil, and was very well pleased with the exploit. *Voilà l'homme!* I then returned the spear into my man's hands, and he forthwith set diligently to work, bringing up about twenty in the course of an hour. It was low tide then—at least the channel alone, between the rows of stakes, held deep water. We anchored there, and rigging on my line and rod, I began fishing. The stream was too strong, and I had to pack up the rod and use hand-lines. I caught about half-a-dozen eels, nothing else, and we came back (after a sail higher up in search of birds) late in the afternoon.

The next morning, perceiving that the wind was fair for a sail up the Yare, I hired a sailing-boat and went by myself, with the gun and about forty cartridges. To enter into the details of that excursion would occupy a good deal of space; suffice it to say that by the time I reached the Red Mill I had fired thirty shots, bagged about fifteen birds, and was as happy as, and perhaps happier than, a king. I know nothing more exhilarating and genuinely amusing than being in a boat on a lovely summer day when there are plenty of birds about. I was alone, it is true, but I did not feel dull a bit, I can assure you. Somehow, one enjoys more deeply the beauties of nature when alone than when in company, and I never weary of being alone when I can enjoy sport. Well, this was another glorious day well employed.

The next day I went to Mutford, and called at Oulton Broad, at the Wherry Hotel, for Sir John S. and Captain B. Both, however, had left that morning for town, having enjoyed but very meagre sport during their stay there—only two small jack. They had, however, hooked a good-sized pike and—lost it. The proprietor of the hotel told me that fishing had not answered well at

all that season, except the small fry, such as roach, &c., which are always abundant, and caught by the hundred. All over the Broads, in fact, small fish abound, but large ones are just now somewhat scarce.

Well, my journey to Oulton Broad and return to Yarmouth took me the best part of the day to perform, and I felt inclined to rest the remainder of the afternoon. But a friend called upon me, with rod and creel, and I could not let him go alone, could I? We therefore went again to the station, and this time took tickets to St. Olaves, a twenty-minutes' ride landing us there, when we made our way towards the Fritton Broad, or Fritton Decoy. A lovelier piece of water it would be hard indeed to find anywhere, and those of my readers who have never fished on the Broads ought, at some early opportunity, to do so. We found the old man at the garden, and without loss of time we got him to let us have a boat for the remainder of the day. There were four or five parties out already; amongst them were several ladies, and oh! how peaceful this lovely retreat did look to be sure! It was very quiet, and is always kept so; more so, perhaps, than it otherwise would be, had not Major Leighes forbidden anyone from landing on the other shore. This keeps the place rather select, and it is all the better for it. My friend had brought gentles, worms, and paste, and we had as pleasant an afternoon as anyone could wish to have. The creel, when we headed to the landing stage, had a nice show. We had been going in for roach, perch, and bream, and had done fairly. One of our neighbours, who had been at it since sunrise, had an awful load to take home. I should say seven or eight anglers were we, making tracks together towards the station, when we struck work for the day.

But oh! those country inns! One of our party felt very unwell, but no innkeeper could be prevailed upon to give him some brandy, because they had no licence for spirits, and as there is no druggist's shop in the village, why, our unfortunate companion had to do without, much to his inconvenience.

Therefore, friend angler, under similar circumstances, do not forget a small flask if you fancy you may need it when going to Fritton.

The next day I devoted to a visit to Buckenham. There I caught so many roach as to be actually tired of it, and I gave it up at 1 P.M. I afterwards caught a bream or two, tried for a pike, but a cantankerous neighbour thereupon scowled at me for moving about, and as it was not worth while ruffling anyone's temper, I went away, very well satisfied with my day's sport.

The following morning I went for my second day's partridge

shooting, but this being a private affair over preserved ground, would need a special paper. The next day I went to Lowestoft, and soon after I left Yarmouth for London.

Now, if anyone could suggest an improvement on the way in which I managed my time during my stay at Yarmouth, it would be, I think, a wrinkle worth knowing. Yet, barring the partridge shooting, every other sport is within the reach of any visitor, with or without friends, and without any extraordinary expenditure, too; and I flatter myself that it is far more pleasant to wander along or on the river with a gun, or to boat on the Broads with a rod, to shoot on the sands, to go eel spearing for a change, or to fish at sea or from the pier head, than to drag day after day one's miserable sand-shoes over that part of the sands where the visitors, mostly old women and Whitechapel excursionists, love to congregate.

I did not quite lose sight of sea fishing, no fear of that, in the midst of my rod and gun excursions. I found two or three afternoons coming in very handy for a long line thrown from the piers and from the harbour. As for the sands, about halfway between the Wellington Pier and the harbour, just in front of the Nelson Monument, I saw a retired captain fishing with a long line, and I had a chat with him. It seems that during the autumn months that spot is one of the best near Yarmouth for sea fishing, codlings of large size being hooked frequently by the dozen in the course of a morning. I stopped by the line to see what would be brought to hand, and saw the captain catch two or three fair whiting and a dogfish. He had a pound-weight lead, and a good throw sent it about twenty yards past the surf, where there is a good bottom for fishing, he said, and no weeds to catch the hooks. From all accounts, I would recommend this place to my readers, as I have since been told that a score of anglers are frequently hard at work there, and generally are very successful in season.

But, for anyone who cannot stand boating on the sea, I think the south pier-head is the best place, for several reasons. First of all it acts as a breakwater, and the sea is always smoother behind it than anywhere else, which makes it a favourite spot with the fish; then you have some shelter for yourself, and that is not to be despised. Sea fishing with hand-lines in autumn and winter is rather cold work, and if you can anyway be sheltered from the rough winds then usually blowing, why so much the better for you, of course. Now, the south pier-head is clean, and has a nice lot of nooks and corners where fifty anglers could take their stand, with comfort to themselves and no annoyance to their

neighbours. The mouth of the harbour itself is not a bad spot either, but it is so bleak that few men can stand it, and the same may be said of fishing from the sands. However, some like it, and in truth, when fish bite, what does the angler care for discomforts? The fever of the sport keeps him warm, and he notices nothing but his line. It is when you are packing up to go home that you generally become aware for the first time of the mess you are in, and one is quite surprised then not to have noticed it before.

Yes, buffeted by the wind, drenched by showers, blinded by the spray, shivering with cold, or roasted or stewed by a broiling hot summer sun, the sea-angler stands his ground like a brick as long as fish bite; and though when he wends his way home, unfeeling people, unendowed with the sacred fire, laugh at his drowned-rat appearance, he turns up his nose and stalks with conscious pride, whilst the tail of his last codling is sticking up behind his back through the "mouth" of his creel.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LOWESTOFT.

DURING my stay at Yarmouth, as already stated, I took advantage of the proximity of Lowestoft and went sea fishing there.

We were to be a rather numerous party, as, besides myself and an elderly friend of mine, we were to be accompanied by his wife and their three sons, ranging from fifteen years old down to twelve. Everything, to the youngsters, was matter for intelligent investigation, and the fire and earnestness with which they entered into any of my pursuits quite won my heart. Our trip had been arranged with their father on a Tuesday afternoon, as we were on the pier having a little fishing.

"If the weather keeps as fine as it is now," quoth he to me, "you may depend upon us, and we will all start together to-morrow morning at nine."

I proposed a slight alteration to the programme.

"Max" (that was the eldest boy)—"Max," said I, tells me that when he had a walk with his brothers the other day, along the sands to Lowestoft, they saw a lot of birds on their way."

Thereupon, chorus from the three boys: "A lot of them!" and sundry individual explanations that one bird which they plainly saw had red legs, sang, when it got up to fly away, like a muffin-man's bell, &c. &c.

"That bird was a redshank," I remarked.

"And a very appropriate name, too," burst out the boys, with irresistible laughter.

"Well now," I went on to their father, whilst they crowded open-mouthed around me, "I will tell you what we will do. Go with the boat and the man to Lowestoft. The boys and I will walk along the shore. I will bring my gun, and we will see what we can bag. Then we will take a waterman's boat at Lowestoft, and row out to meet you. Will that do?"

"Beautifully," they all said.

So that was arranged.

My friend's wife opined that she would like to join us in the sailing trip; but I had nothing to do with that part of the affair, which proved, as I expected, a failure. But then, ladies when ashore are always very brave and confident in their own powers, they always forget how insidious sea-sickness is: but of this, more in due time.

Well, at seven o'clock the next morning, Max and his two brothers turned up as agreed upon. I was ready and waiting, so away we went, with hope burning high in our breasts. When we arrived near the sands, where there was as yet nobody visible, I explained to my companions the *modus operandi* we were bound to adopt, if we wished to be successful.

"So long as no birds are to be seen we can walk on together and talk as much as we like, but the moment we see anything on the sands or flying along the shore, you must squat where you will happen to be, and remain there as motionless as possible until I have fired or the birds are gone. Anyhow, you must wait there until I sign to you to come on."

We then left Gorleston, and stepped on the sands. We walked about half a mile without catching sight of any birds, and Fred (the youngest of the lads), who is bird-stuffer-in-chief to the family, was growing despondent. Frank was cheering him up. Max was walking with me in front of them and said nothing, but looked intently ahead. The wind was blowing on shore, somewhat S.E., and the tide going down, half spent. There was no sun, there being a thick lot of clouds overhead, travelling slowly, so that it was just cool enough to make a long walk pleasant.

When we had covered half a mile, Fred besought me to shoot a small bird which was fluttering near the cliffs.

"It is a nice bird," he said; "I would like to stuff it."

"Very well," I replied, and I floored the bird, adding, "Go and pick it up, then."

Thereupon he and Frank ran, smoothed the bird's feathers, and were lost in their anticipations of eventually seeing it in a glass case.

Whilst they were so engaged I saw three oxbirds flying over the sea towards us, some forty or fifty yards over the water. I dropped on my right knee, Max at once crept behind me. The two others, at first, were petrified; but Max signing to them to do as we had done, they sat down and kept still, staring at the coming birds open-mouthed, and I could read in their eyes a strong hope that they would be bagged. The three birds passed

far when they saw us, and I fired the first shot unsuccessfully, but the second dropped the tail bird.

"There is one down! there is one dead! I saw him drop! How shall we get it? what a pity it fell in the water!" &c. &c.

Such were the exclamations that burst forth from the lips of my enthusiastic companions.

Max, with tight lips and his hands in his pockets, was looking on with deliberation.

"What sort of a bird is it?" asked little Fred.

"An oxbird," I replied.

"Oh, what a pity it is lost; I have never seen one, and it would have been so nice stuffed!"

"You shall have it," then remarked Max, taking off his coat.

"What are you going to do?" I asked him.

"Undress and swim to it," replied the lad.

"It would hardly be worth while doing so, even if the bird were finer and bigger," I said; "at any rate I could not allow you, under any circumstances, to run into danger, so put on your coat again; but make your minds easy," I added, when I saw the looks of despair that stole over their faces, "you will eventually get the bird."

"Won't it sink, then?" they asked breathlessly.

"No fear of that, it would float, even in a storm, and as the wind is blowing dead on shore, it must be drifting towards us. Keep your eyes on it whilst I go on, and you will soon pick it up. But mind, wait till it comes to you, don't you go in the water, any of you. There was a lad drowned at Yarmouth the other day, and I don't wish the same fate to befall any of you."

I was rather glad to see the trio stopping together to watch and wait for the bird, because the lads had told me they wished for a sea-gull or two to stuff, and I had just caught sight of a dozen or so, flying close to the shore over some dead fish, about 200 yards from where we were, and as I went towards them alone, it gave me a better chance to bag one. Fate served me well. The birds were so intent on their meal and their consequent fight, that they allowed me to get opposite to them without taking much notice. I faced them then, holding the gun ready, and when two came within range I fired and both dropped, one quite dead, the other one badly wounded.

On hearing the reports the rest of the birds bolted, and the lads ran towards me as hard as they could tear, for they had seen the two large birds coming down.

"What are they? Where are they? Oh what beauties!" were now their exclamations.

But that was as nothing when compared to their enthusiasm when the birds drifted ashore, and they picked them up. If ever three boys were pleased, those three were. So much so that they had almost forgotten their oxbird.

"Are you going then to leave it behind?" I inquired.

Not if they knew it. They went back and found it on the sand, where the sea had just thrown it.

We then went forward, and soon after we saw the boat containing their father and mother leave the Yarmouth harbour and head our way towards Lowestoft. When the boat got within a quarter of a mile of us, they had to tack away as the wind was against them. We waved our hands and hats, the lady shook her handkerchief, and they went, taking a cut towards one of the big buoys a mile or so from the lightship. It was then nearly ten o'clock, and the boys, who like me had brought some luncheon, began to feel hungry. We sat down near the cliff and took out our provisions, after discussing which we had a glass of sherry apiece, and, thoroughly refreshed, went on like veterans.

We were about halfway then, and saw plainly that if we did not make haste the heads of the family would arrive a long time before we did, and would have to wait for us. We therefore put our best feet foremost, Max carrying my cartridges, Fred with the game-bag slung over his shoulders, and Frank stroking and smoothing the feathers of one of the big birds.

I shot a redshank, and after two or three ineffectual shots at oxbirds at rifle-range, we arrived safe and sound, though rather tired, at Lowestoft. The town was very lively, and the visitors eyed us very superciliously, probably because they were in their lounge clothes and we were not. We made our way towards the harbour, intending to take a boat as agreed upon, and go out to meet our friends, but when just on the point of striking a bargain to that purpose with two men, our boat ran into harbour and drew up alongside.

"Where is mother?" shouted the boys, when they were near enough.

The father expressively pointed out the cabin, with a grin and signs to be quiet.

"Sick, eh, father?" asked Max, in a stage whisper.

"Yes," nodded paterfamilias, emphatically.

"Oh, what a lark!" somewhat irreverently exclaimed the boys.

It was lucky their mother had not heard them. She was just getting her head out of the cabin, and plaintively requested to be landed at once. This done, another unforeseen incident occurred. No sooner was the lady ashore than she objected to our embark-

ing and leaving her behind ; but finally, after a deal of persuasion, she consented to go to the station and take a ticket back to Yarmouth.

We then all jumped on board, and when we were a mile away asked the boatman which was the best spot about.

"Well," he said, "it is all about the same. Where we are is not bad, and nearer the mouth of the harbour we should get flat-fish."

I did not mind where we anchored provided we caught fish, and we therefore turned her head to the wind, got the foresail, jib, and mainsail down, rattled away the chain and anchor, and there we were.

Whilst the man made the sails snug we prepared our lines. The boys were adepts at the art of sea fishing, and very enthusiastic at the prospect of such a fine afternoon at sea. We had mussels, half-a dozen herrings, and a pint of shrimps for bait. There was consequently every likelihood of our suiting the tastes of those denizens of the deep who happened to be in our vicinity. Five lines going, and all well attended to, means fun if there be any fish about, and fun we had. The boys were accustomed to fish from the piers, and used to catch tidy creelfuls ; but at sea the fish generally run larger than near shore, and our little companions were frantic at each good-sized one they brought up.

"I like this far better than river fishing," exclaimed Max.

"So do we," answered his brothers.

"Why," Max went on, "in a river you catch fish the length of my little finger, and you don't know what to do with them. But those whitings, and codlings, and flounders, and coalfish, and gurnets, and the others, are something worth eating; and catching them is a rare treat!"

So far, therefore, I am not alone in my way of thinking respecting sea fishing. In fact, everyone who has once tried it endeavours to have as much of it as he possibly can. It becomes a perfect passion. The moment you catch sight of the sea, you picture the shoals of fish that are therein on the look-out for your bait, and you cannot experience a moment's peace until you are seated in a boat, holding a well-baited line in your hand, and feeling for the bites. Each time I see the sea the same feeling comes over me, and I know others feel as I do.

Well, altogether, we had better sport at Lowestoft than at Yarmouth ; why, I cannot explain. The bottom is just the same, the fish of the same sort, but they bit well at Lowestoft, whereas at Yarmouth it was quite a job to make up a creel.

Whilst we were very intent on fishing we had a bit of a sensation.

I was holding my line well up, having just had several strong nibbles, when, on turning my head towards the south, what should I see but a flock of black-ducks, about fifteen in number, skimming the waves, and coming straight as could be towards our boat.

"Jehoshaphat!" I exclaimed in a whisper, letting go my line, and jumping on to the top of the cabin, where I had placed the gun out of harm's way.

Of course, this act and exclamation of mine caused a general commotion on board.

"Get in, get in, as quick as you can," I said to my companions, and they got into the cabin with all speed, whilst I only allowed my head to appear above the deck, and looked out for the birds. Everybody knows how fast these birds fly; in a moment they were upon us. They did not seem to mind us much until they arrived within a hundred yards, when they gave us a wide berth, and were fully eighty yards from the boat, and going at the rate of sixty odd miles an hour, when I pulled both barrels, almost together. Thereupon, the line scattered, but the leader keeping on well it was soon reformed, and they went on as if nothing had happened.

We then jumped again to our lines. I found a gurnet and a crab on mine, and everybody had something on his -some, fish, and others, anemones. It was a rare bit of fun when the lines were all brought to view. Anyhow, all the hooks were bare, and that was a good sign.

Towards four o'clock it began to rain. There was only one oilskin on board, and therefore only one of us could fish at a time. Whilst he did so, the others congregated round the fire in the cabin, for it was getting quite cold, and the sea air of an evening is always something of a refresher. We chatted on all sorts of sporting topics, and my young friends seemed quite amused at my stock of anecdotes. Shooting seemed to be just the thing for Max, and the way his eyes sparkled when I related to them some adventures which had befallen me, or friends of mine, bespoke a boy who had made up his mind to be a shooter too. The pater looked on approvingly; he is a rare good shot himself, and naturally enough, likes to see his tastes revived in his sons.

We spent thus a very pleasant hour or so, until I looked outside, and saw that there was but a very meagre prospect of the sky clearing up at all for the evening, so I proposed we should go. The wind was fair for the return journey, and in an hour's time we should be back at Yarmouth, at the boat's moorings. Before, however, tripping up our anchor, we had to do a general clear up, as our tackle, fish, and bait were all over the place. One of the

boys, therefore, donned the oilskin, in which he looked like a scarecrow, and amidst the laughter of his brothers and himself, he undertook to wind up the lines and to clear up the stern-sheets. This took him a good quarter of an hour, and when the fish were all washed and packed, the lines put in the creels, and the bait pitched overboard, we lent a hand to our man, and away we went, just when the lightship was beginning to show forth his fixed white and his revolving red lights. We arrived when night had set in, and had to trudge in the darkness to our respective temporary homes, amidst a drizzling rain. This somewhat marred the enjoyment of the day; but one cannot have everything, and so far we had thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in our humble way.

October, 1875.

CHAPTER L.

BRIGHTON.

BRIGHTON, the "Queen of Watering-places," is also the queen of sea-fishing stations on the South-East coast, and the sport I met there I can only compare to that of Plymouth, for it was quite first-class, and it came as a rare *bonne bouche*, after the moderate work we had experienced of late in the sea-fishing line.

First of all, however, let me give to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar. In this case, Cæsar to be represented by the Brighton boatmen. A more civil and obliging lot it has rarely been my fate to deal with, and oh *rara avis*! any amount of bait and almost any kind of it is always to be had, at their hands, on the very shortest notice. That is how things should be, and that is what I have been preaching about ever since I began relating these sea-fishing excursions. Nothing is so likely to induce a visitor to fish as to find that, when the fit comes into his head, the men have everything he needs, quite ready. Other boatmen, please copy in deeds, if not in writing.

As for fish, I believe fish come where there is a deal of fishing going on, for the sake of the bait; for the sea at Brighton, which is every day affording sport, when the weather suits, to scores of fishermen, amateurs and professionals, could boast of a most splendid show of fish just then, and, as I have already stated, better sport could not have been had anywhere.

When I arrived at Brighton, several boatmen to whom I spoke told me this cheering news, but interested parties, as a rule, give information which ought to be taken *cum grano salis*, and I generally take it with a large dose of salt. Much to my astonishment, however, and, there is no need to add, enthusiasm, I found the information correct, and rejoiced greatly thereat. The only drawback that I can see to fishing in the locality is there is no harbour, consequently should the weather turn squally a yacht

has no shelter near at hand, but must needs run up eastward until he can reach Newhaven, Folkestone, or Dover, or westward to Shoreham, Littlehampton, or Chichester Harbour. Of course, if the squall should blow the right way, one would soon get into Newhaven or Shoreham Harbours, out of harm's way; but should it blow the reverse (squalls usually do blow anywhere but where you would like to go), it would take a good while to run into shelter, and during the journey something serious might happen to a small craft. Those were the reasons that prevented us from using the yacht for this expedition. The season of the year does not warrant any extravagance in the way of sailing, as the weather changes brutally in the course of a few hours; and if you are far out to sea, and away from a harbour, you run very unnecessary dangers in the mere pursuit of pleasure. This, I think, is foolhardiness, and is therefore to be avoided.

Besides, as regards Brighton, there is a multitude of craft of all rigs, of all sizes, and with all sorts of accommodation to be had at any time; and it is also better to use one of these, manned by those belonging to the place, because, firstly, these men know the best places for fishing; secondly, they have always bait on hand; thirdly, if, when you are at sea, the weather turns nasty, they run you ashore in a moment at a point of the shingle where their "chums" are waiting for them, and you are hauled up bodily, in a jiffey, on the beach.

These considerations induced me, therefore, to go to Brighton single-handed; and certainly I did well, for, as it turned out, the second day of my stay there turned awfully rough in the afternoon. If we had been in Charlie's yacht, and had been obliged to ride out the gale, it would have been an unmistakable treat, no doubt.

Well, I arrived in company with a good trainful of visitors, at about 1 P.M., in the course of a lovely afternoon. I straightway got luncheon, and then went to the beach. The first sight that met my gaze was on the shingle near a small boat—a bucket half full of squid, on the top of which two or three mackerel were stiffening their backs. In the boat, which was high and dry quite close to the road pavement, was a man preparing a long line, and mending it with a knife and hooks. I thereupon signed to him, and we got into conversation.

"Any fish about?" I asked him.

"Lots, sir."

"Are you going out to-day, that you are rigging out this long line of yours?"

"Yes, sir, I am going to set it by the Blackrock."

"What time did you intend starting?"

"In an hour's time. Would you like to come with us?"

"Yes, I should," I replied, "but I would like also a little hand-line fishing."

"Very good, sir; then we will start now if you please, and whilst you fish, we can prepare our long line."

So saying, he jumped out of the boat, picked up the bucket of bait, placed it in the bows, and called out to his mate, who was hard by, chatting with a companion. Both men then tucked up their trousers, asked me to get into the boat, then with one or two more hands launched the boat, when the two men jumped in aft, and forthwith set about loosening the sheets. When the sails were set, one of the men stopped at the tiller, whilst the other went forward, and went on with his long-line preparation. He had some stunning hooks on, and I asked him if they had caught lately any large congers that they had such hooks.

"Yes," he said, "yesterday we caught one that weighed well-nigh thirty pounds. It takes a pretty big hook to hold such a fish, of course, and I daresay to-day we will get some: but the best way of getting large congers is to drop the line overnight, and never lift it until the following morning. Then, you sometimes get tremendous fellows. In daytime the capture of a large conger-eel is of rare occurrence, though it sometimes happens of course that a monster will chance to get himself caught."

Whilst chatting thus we were making very fair way. We had passed the Chain Pier near the Aquarium, and were scudding along in nice style over a tolerably smooth sea. The weather was very fine, the beach was well sprinkled with visitors, the roads were covered with vehicles and foot-passengers going up and down from the town to the beach, and *vice versâ*; so that the season was apparently in its prime, or something very much like it, at Brighton. We went along the cliffs for a good distance, and then my man, after a short consultation with his mate, addressed me, and said that where we happened to be was a very fine spot for bream, gurnet, and congers.

"Very well, then, let us stop here awhile," I said; "down with your sails and anchor, and I will try what I can do."

Whilst they were taking in the jib and mainsail I prepared one of my lines, a strong one, with a large bottom hook for bottom fish, and two on whalebone, a yard between them and the lead, for bream, &c. I baited the bottom hook with mackerel and the top ones with mudworm. When the boat was settled and somewhat steady, I dropped the line overboard, and lifting up the lead when it reached bottom, I almost immediately felt a vicious tug. I

struck, felt, and stood still for a second; there was nothing on the line, but I was convinced I had had a good bite, and that probably my bait had gone. I hauled in. The mackerel bait had disappeared. My men, thereupon, look at one another with sudden interest. Presently one of them comes aft, and, whilst I am rebaiting, says:

"If you will let me have one of your lines, sir, I should like to look at it."

I lent him one, and he went to show it to his companion.

"Where do you get this whalebone?" said they presently.

"Any knick-knack shop will get some for you," I returned. "It is far more sensitive to the touch than iron chopsticks, and fish get sooner hooked with them because they give way so to the bite, whereas the iron chopsticks are stiff and warn the fish nibbling that there is something wrong."

"True, true," said they. And they forthwith made up their minds to rig their hand-lines in the whalebone fashion for the future.

Meanwhile I had got my bait right again, and was feeling all the while talking with the men. Presently there is no mistake. Up I haul, and the men peep over the gun'ale. A conger, half a yard long, comes up on the bottom hook. One of the men thereupon comes to me and takes charge of the fish, rebaits my hook with style and despatch, puts it overboard, and says: "All right," when I let go. This time I get a few nibbles; then a dead weight hangs on, and lifting the line the said weight finds fault with the process and wishes to bolt. This, however, is now impossible, and I bring up a "soldier," *i.e.* a fine gurnet with a brilliant red coat, which flashes in the sun like the variegated colours on a shell. The gurnet is a pound fish, and looks very grand. My next catch, on one of the top hooks, is a codling about a foot long. No sooner is he brought up than my men prognosticate a school of them about us, and in this they seemingly were correct, for I caught no less than seven within half an hour. None were large. I do not think the largest weighed over a pound, but these fish are, notwithstanding their small size, reputed nice catches on account of their fine taste. I never ate but one in my life, and found it rather insipid, but then it may be a matter of taste or a matter of cooking. A French cook, it is said, would make of an old leather apron a magnificent hash; and no doubt with a better material to start with and work upon, such as a young codling, for instance, he would produce a superlatively fine dish.

At four o'clock I had some dozen of fish, and we removed out to sea, when a belt of sands was announced as being eminently

stocked with soles, flounders, plaice, turbot, &c. My men were anxious to set the long line, and I was nothing loath to see it lifted, so we agreed to first set it and fish afterwards for an hour or so.

As soon as we were in the right spot the men began operations by taking down all sail, one of them undertaking to keep the boat under way with the oars. This done, and the oarsman installed on the midship seat and ready, the other man let go the first anchor and buoy and paid out the line carefully. Some of the hooks were baited with cuttle-fish, some with mackerel, some with herring, and a few with lug-worms. The largest hooks were literally covered with bait, which shows that these men were wise in their generation, knowing full well that just as they sow so will they reap. It took us about a quarter of an hour to get everything satisfactorily settled, for it does not pay to go too fast when setting a long line.

When the end anchor and buoy were let go, we went a little farther to try hand-line fishing. The two men joined me this time, as we had a lot of bait left and only an hour or so to spare. We caught several fine plaice, two or three soles, a large hake, a fine brill, two or three whitings, and no end of small fry. We therefore were fully occupied for the time being, and it was rather enjoyable when compared to the dull times I had had during some of my late excursions.

Towards six the men hinted that it would just be right to see about the long line, and as I felt as inquisitive as themselves, we hurriedly wound up our lines and cleared the stern sheets to make room for the line, anchor, and buoys. The sea, meanwhile, be it said, had got somewhat rough, on account of a somewhat smart evening breeze ruffling its surface. This state of affairs made the lifting of the line a somewhat tedious job for both rower and lifter, but they managed well and without a single mishap. When the first anchor was brought up, and the end of the line was in the man's hands, he declared that there was either a large conger or some other large fish on at no very great distance. Before he got to it, however, he brought two or three flat-fish and a whiting. The conger was not so large as had been expected, but it nevertheless was of fair length, and far more troublesome than his length and thickness seemed to warrant. Of course the whole batch was brought up and laid in at the bottom of the boat, just as it came, to be looked after at our leisure, when the whole line was aboard. I had thought the line was a great deal longer than it really was, and I was therefore surprised rather at the despatch which I thought had been made

when we reached the end. But it turned out that it was only a hundred-hooks line. That explained the quickness of the affair.

We had about fourteen fish caught, three or four of which were really very fine ones; but the men asseverated, with due emphasis, that a night-line laid down at dark and lifted at daybreak would have had at least double that number of catches.

"We intend coming again to-night, sir," said one of the men to me; "will you again join us?"

"What do you intend doing?"

"Setting one or two long lines for the night."

"Well, but there is not much fun in setting them. I will tell you what I will do. If you will call for me at the hotel in the morning, when you go to lift up your lines, I will go with you then with pleasure."

It was arranged thus, and, the wind being somewhat foul, the two men took the oars and pulled hard to get their boat back to the station before dusk.

When landed, I felt a considerable vacuum in my internal economy, and accordingly I made tracks at once for the dining-room.

Early the following morning Boots called me, and a sleepy maid got me some breakfast in the coffee-room. Whilst discussing that meal both the men turned up, the hotel being on their way to the beach.

"Bring them in," I said to Boots.

"Oh sir!" exclaimed the latter, with some horror, "there will be a row with the governor if I do let these men walk in here!"

"Why, you stupid fellow, there is nobody down as yet, and they will be off directly."

"Oh! all right, then," he said; and he seemed, when bringing them in, as though engaged in a smuggling expedition.

Of course the men eyed the breakfast things with delectation. I explained to them the state of the case, viz. I was not ready yet, but would be in a quarter of an hour. If they liked, they might go with Boots, and that worthy would give them some breakfast. They agreed quite readily to that, although they had had their breakfast at home, and the trio disappeared. When I was ready they were not; but in two or three minutes we made a start, and found that the "Queen of Watering Places" was a very lazy place indeed, as there was nobody stirring as yet, except on the shingle, where several fishermen were getting their crafts and nets in order. The wind had gone down very sensibly, and everything seemed to promise us a lovely day. The sun was just rising somewhere towards Holland when we turned up on the beach, and

its red ball invaded the sky with quite a halo of glory. It was coldish rather, be it said. Early in the morning, before the sun has been up any length of time, the air is generally sharp by the sea-shore; but when once you have put yourself in motion, this very freshness of the atmosphere makes you feel particularly jolly and comfortable.

"O-oh! a-ah! hee-hee! There she goes."

Thus sang my boatmen, as we all heaved the craft, and brought it to the water's-edge.

Then we got in, the neighbours gave us a friendly shove, and off we were. I then noticed in the bows two large fish-boxes, marked "Somebody, Billingsgate," and thereupon I chaffed the men.

"You have provided, I see, some suitable receptacle for your fish; are you, then, so sure of catching many?" I asked them.

They laughed. Yes, they knew they would, at any rate, fill the two boxes, because they had set two long lines; and making allowance for the rubbish and small, unsuitable fish that might be caught, they felt certain that good ones would be on also.

We sailed towards the same part of the bay we had been in the day before, and there we looked out for the painted buoys.

"Here they are!" shouted the look-out man; "hard a-starboard!"

And we turned her head to the wind, and got her wings down. Then both men looked uncommonly serious, and began the work on hand. Now, I trow there are very few things more interesting to the man who is fond of all sorts of sports than an insight into the way in which professional fishermen carry on their industry, no matter what sort of fish they are in pursuit of, and the means they employ in order to catch them. At the same time, line-fishing is, of all methods, the one which will always prove the most entertaining to the uninitiated, simply because the catches are then coming one by one, not crushed to death or half-dead, as fish in nets are apt to be, but all alive and lively, which lends a great deal of enchantment to the affair.

Our oarsman knew what he was about, and moved the boat neither too slowly nor too fast, keeping his eyes on his companion, and regulating his own motions by the speed with which the line came up. On the other hand, he who lifted the line coiled it round and round naturally to all appearance, for he seemed to pay no particular attention to it, but, all the same, it was very neatly done, and all his fish was outside, kicking and wriggling as much as they chose. When the first line was in, with some two-score of marketable fish, it was deemed advisable to clear

the said line, *i.e.* to unhook the fish, and put the line out of the way to make room for the other one; so we all set to work unhooking the fish, and coiling back the line into the second basket. With this one catch one of the fish-boxes was full to repletion, and the other box had its bottom well covered, so my men were mighty pleased, and I was very glad for their sakes.

The second line had been equally well patronised, as it turned out, and we made towards shore directly it was cleared and the fish packed up, so as to send it off at once. Fortunately, however, we fell in with two men in a rowing-boat, who undertook to take charge of the cargo. It was therefore handed over to them, and we returned to our favourite spot in order to have a little fishing for fun.

We only had an hour or so at it, however, for the weather became very wild, and we had to get away before our craft became unmanageable.

Whilst we were fishing, I observed many birds about the cliffs, and had thereupon some conversation with the boatmen. They said that many sea-birds breed in those cliffs, and that in winter time many residents of Brighton go on sea-trips for the sake of the shooting. One of the men said that he went once with a London gentleman who was a visitor in the town, and they bagged, between them, a score of birds in three hours. I daresay it is true, for the number I saw about us was great, and in winter weather would be likely to be ten or a hundredfold multiplied.

I saw two or three divers half a mile from us, and one passed flying within sixty yards of our boat. That was when the waves were beginning to show their white crests. I suppose the birds then were somewhat disturbed in the open sea, and sought out a shelter of some sort. I had no gun with me, else I might have been tempted to go in chase.

Well, we turned back, and eventually the weather became very squally, so that all the boats made for shore, the men no doubt being thankful to do so. In an hour's time there was not a single small craft anywhere to be seen, and that state of things lasted the remainder of the day. Two or three heavy showers came down, and were alternately accompanied with tremendous gusts of wind. The large sailing-vessels, far away in the Channel, were under reefed sails, and everything looked wild in the extreme.

This state of things prevented my having any more fishing at Brighton.

I utilised the afternoon by going to the Aquarium, where I looked in vain for a porpoise. I saw the usual fish, in the usual tanks, and must confess I was surprised at the limited variety to

be found there. The dogfish seem to have any amount of tanks devoted to their use; but as they are not a particularly interesting sort of fish to study, such ample accommodation as is devoted to them is somewhat startling. Their eggs, of course, are very extraordinary things to behold; but if all those I saw exhibited do "hatch" well, the management will be able to stock all their tanks with dogfish if they like. The black-bream were as usual, with their thin round backs and protruding stomachs, opening and shutting their mouths, making round eyes all the while, and seemed to say: "We know all about everything," and then puffed and blew like a lot of aldermen. The topers (*i.e.* ground-sharks) were having a fine promenade up and down their handsome apartments, and one of them reminded me very forcibly of one I became intimately acquainted with two or three years ago. Their "pilots" were as pilots ought to be, very cool-headed and steady, and the whole tribe of fishes in fact appeared very happy and contented, except a mackerel who, in a neighbouring tank, seemed to be suffering a fit of the blues.

There was a band playing near the Grotto, and a fashionable audience had assembled there to hear it. But what a funny idea to have a band and concert in an aquarium. Do the fish like it, I wonder?

I met two friends in the reading-room, and there we spent some two hours, as it was pouring "cats and dogs" outside. There being no prospect of a favourable change, I went to the station, and came back to town, delighted on the whole with my trip to Brighton.

October, 1875.

CHAPTER LI.

NEWHAVEN HARBOUR AND SEAFORD BAY.

The season for bottom sea fishing was just then getting in its prime, and those anglers who take an interest therein will do well to commence before the winter frosts and storms make the pursuit uncomfortable and cold.

We had had a foretaste of what winter might bring forth, for during our excursion, when we rowed back from Seaford Bay to Newhaven Harbour by moonlight, the trip was a rather cold undertaking, though not without its charms, but one must be well prepared already with ulster, &c.

I went down with a friend to see what fish were to be caught at Newhaven and Seaford, and he was thankful I had given him a timely hint as to the contingencies he might have to put up with during our trip. He intended going in a summer suit, only providing a thin waterproof coat, and thought he would be very comfortable.

"That is all very well," I remarked, "if we were going out shooting, when our long tramps would effectually keep us warm, and render a thick long coat rather a nuisance than a comfort. But we are going sea fishing, probably in an open boat, where exercise will be entirely confined to working our respective deep lines, and where a good heat-keeping coat is a *sine quâ non* of comfort."

"But," he objected, "it is not cold yet. I am sure I could stand it very well."

"I am equally certain you could not. It is cold work, now, to be at sea, and to remain there quiet and without a fire; so take my advice, and get a good overcoat."

Well, he did so rather reluctantly, but on that very evening, when on our moonlight return journey, you should have seen him with his coat-collar over his ears and his hands elbow-deep in his pockets.

"Well," I said, "how would you have felt now with your thin waterproof, eh?"

"Oh, dang it," said he, "pray don't mention it! It makes my teeth chatter only to think of it!"

But I must hark back, and begin at the beginning. We arrived at Newhaven at about half-past twelve (noon), and as the first duty of a sportsman is "to know how to cater," we forthwith made up our minds to fortify the inner man well before entering into the business we had taken in hand. Whilst having our meal, we told our landlord the need in which we stood of a good boatman to take us out. He looked thoughtful for a moment or so, walked out without answering a word, came back in a minute or two with a knowing air, and said he had sent for a fellow that would suit us.

The said fellow turned up in a quarter of an hour, and expressed his willingness to take us out as far as ever we would like to go. We wanted some bait, however, and that was a poser to everybody, including the boatman, who scratched his ears with evident perplexity. But all this was "put on," for when I hinted plainly that we would not go out without bait, he said "he would see, he would try, at any rate," and he went.

Well, we finished our repast, got our paraphernalia ready, and at last the boatman returned with a tin containing some scuttle, a few fish, and a handful of mussels, all of which, more or less, struck our olfactory organs as being rather *avancé*, but he declared they were quite right and the best that could be got, so off we went.

A low sky, no sun, no wind, no sea; such was the state of affairs when we embarked.

Whilst the man busied himself with his boat, we began preparing our tackle and mending one or two of my lines that had not been looked to since my last expedition, when they had met with some slight damage, and we were so intent on that occupation that we hardly noticed we had left the harbour, and were scudding away in the bay.

Our man, however, was no adept at fishing, for he did not know any of the most favourable spots thereabouts, and probably never went out on his own hook for any fishing expedition. It was, therefore, lucky that several other boats were out in the bay. These boats, at least those that were at anchor, gave us some intimation as to the known pet places, and we took advantage thereof to instal ourselves just opposite the Seaford cliffs. Our man brought down the sails, anchored the boat, put mast and sails and gear out of the way in the bows, arranged a sort of tent for himself,

lighted his pipe, crawled under his extempore awning, and eventually disappeared, all but his feet. He is evidently no enthusiast, and such being the case it was just as well he got himself out of the way. Before we had caught our first fish he was in the land of dreams, and I strongly suspect he had been carousing heavily the night before.

Well, we began operations with mussels and shrimps, as these were the most likely of our bait to be fresh. We had at first a school of codlings about us, and began hauling them in in first-rate style, varying occasionally with whiting and pouting. Then suddenly, we could feel no more bites, and two men who were fishing in a boat 200 yards from us began taking them as fast as they could. My friend wondered what it meant.

"Do you feel any nibbles?" said he to me at last.

"No, I do not; there is a ground-shark of some sort near, you may depend."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when my companion cried out excitedly, and hurriedly held his line with both hands:

"I cannot manage it," said he; "it will break the line!"

"A conger probably," I thought, "or else a dogfish."

"Hold fast, and bring him up gently, or the line will smash."

Well, he began bringing him up, when all at once—

"The line is quite slack," said he.

And just as he said this, an enormous dogfish, certainly a yard long, jumped out of the water a few yards from the boat, and we could see that the hook was in him.

"I thought as much," I remarked.

But my youthful comrade-in-sport was positively frightened.

"Don't let us have this infernal-looking beast in here," said he, "for goodness' sake! I should not have a moment's peace, and if it came my way I would sooner jump overboard than be touched by it."

"That is all very well," I retorted; "but what about the line?"

"Oh, bother the line!" said he, "cut it; let the shark go! Do anything, but don't let us have it here."

He thrust the line into my hands, and removed himself into the bow, where he stumbled over our sleeping boatman.

"What is the row, gentlemen?" said this worthy.

"Nothing—only a dogfish."

"Kill it," said he, jumping up with sudden earnestness.

"Well, kill it yourself, if you like."

And when I brought up the devilish-looking fellow, the man placed his hobnailed boot over its head, and cut it off. My companion shuddered at the sight.

"It bites, does it not?" he asked in some trepidation.

"Rather," replied the man. "They are as vicious as can be, them fish is."

With this highly ungrammatical but very truthful remark, the man cleared the hook, and in compliance with my friend's request pitched the dogfish overboard. This was the largest I had as yet seen caught that season. It was certainly a yard long from nose to tail-fin.

"I saw a dead one on the beach," said our man, "the other day; it was bigger than this one, and it had a hole in its head as though it had been shot, though that's unlikely."

"Not at all unlikely," I said; "I have myself shot one on the Belgian coast two years ago. The fish had got into a large shallow pool and was left there by the tide. I was wildfowl shooting at the time, and when passing the pool the fish made such a jump out of the water that it attracted my attention. I went towards the pool and soon made out the fish. He was double the size round the body of the one you have just killed, and was at least half as long again. He was slowly swimming along the bottom, in the deepest part of the water, but it was all sand there, and the water was perfectly clear, so I followed its motions, with my finger on the trigger, and when it came to a shallow part I banged at him with such effect that he was killed right out. I pulled him out to look at him, and some Coast Guard men, who had seen me fire, and were wondering what I had been shooting, came and said it was a *requin*, or shark. All these fish belong to the same family, and a dogfish is, undoubtedly, some sort of shark."

Well, having got rid of our dogfish, we thought of resuming our angling where we were, but another boat drawing near told us that we were too far out, and that a hundred yards or so nearer the shore would place us just over a belt of rocks, where we should in all probability meet with very good sport. The party who gave us this information belonged to Newhaven, and were enjoying the beautiful day in sailing up and down the bay. Beautiful days were rather scarce just then, so that it behoved any one fond of out-door sports to make the most of the few such that cropped up now and then.

We, of course, received the information with thanks, and removed at once to the proper station.

We caught there several very good whitings, two small congers, a few poutings, a codling, and then my friend caught what we suppose must have been an octopus, or squid, or &c. (for it has as many *aliases* as any burglar "well-known" to the police), but we

(that is, the boatman and I) never caught sight of it, although from my friend's description it must have been it. First of all, let me premise that my young companion was excessively nervous. He liked the sport very well, just as a boy likes to play with gunpowder, for the sake of the sparks and the spice of a little danger, but when the latter made a show of appearing on the scene, my worthy companion collapsed directly. Now he had just caught a "weaver," and when told that its ugly little sharp-pointed back fin would give him a severe wound if he touched it with his hands, he thrust away both weaver and line, and besought once more the man to rid him of the ugly little fish.

Well, some people are certainly born under unlucky stars, for his next catch was what must have been the octopus. He said he had something on his line, adding:

"It does not pull like a fish, but it is heavy and strong," so he pulled up his line and peeped over the gunwale meanwhile, so as to catch sight of the forthcoming stranger.

"B-r r r! Euh!" exclaimed he suddenly with a shudder, jumping up from his seat, and letting go the line; "I am not going to bring *that* in the boat, no, not if I know it!"

"What is it? What is the matter?" I and the boatman asked with lively interest.

"I don't know, I am sure," he replied, still shivering; "but I want none of it."

"Well, but what was it like!"

"Oh! I don't know—a violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow bag, with a beak, and four or five hundred legs! more or less like an enormous spider."

"That is a squid, master," said the boatman, "and good bait they are, too. Why, them bits of white gray stuff in the tin are pieces of squid cut for bait."

"I dare say they are," retorted my friend; "I don't mind it when it is cut; but don't bring the beastly-looking thing in here. Is it a fish or an insect? What is it? I have read a lot about them. They do eat men, don't they?"

"Hem! I daresay," replied the boatman, "that if you fell overboard and got drowned they would soon fasten on you. Crabs, too, are very fond of flesh, and——"

But I stopped him there, as I did not want him to frighten my young companion.

In the meantime, the man had brought up the line to see if the "squid" was still on; but he of the "many arms" had gone. When this was ascertained, we bethought ourselves that it was about time to make tracks for the harbour. It was getting dark,

the lights were sparkling at the mouth of the port, and the wooden piers were already hardly discernible with the naked eye, owing to the distance we were from them and the increasing darkness.

"How many miles are we now from Newhaven?" I inquired of the man.

"About three miles, sir. The wind is not exactly fair, so it will take us about an hour to get back, then it will be night."

"Let us go then; I begin to feel hungry, and there is nothing more to be done."

Off we went. The wind was blowing from shore, so that where we were we had enjoyed comparatively very smooth water, owing to the high cliffs on the left of Seaford protecting us very effectually against the direct effect of the breeze; but when once we cleared the shelter afforded us by the cliffs we began to dance well, and no mistake. Meanwhile the moon rose, and we had a beautiful trip over the sparkling sea. We got back comfortably in good time, and were glad to stretch our legs ashore a bit after being cramped up in the small boat so long.

We had our supper soon, as we intended an early start in the morning; and as there was nothing to be seen in Newhaven worth going out for, we went to bed betimes.

At about two o'clock I woke up to find a perfect gale blowing. My windows were rattling unceasingly, and heavy drops of rain dashed fast and furiously against the panes.

"That will put a stop to another trip on the sea, or I am very much mistaken," I thought, and in that surmise I was correct; for when we came down to breakfast, at eight o'clock, the gale was still blowing hard, and even the harbour was anything but steady. Still, the water was there comparatively quiet, and when our boatman turned up to lament the state of affairs, we told him to get the boat trimmed for a trip in the harbour. This brightened him up, and he was all alacrity. He went, and returned in a quarter of an hour to say that everything was ready, and we went with him.

The harbour at Newhaven is not by any means a large one, although continental steamers start therefrom; and, as it was crowded with vessels, it was not very easy to pick out a suitable place where to fish in peace and quietness without being in anybody's way. We went by the side of a large brig, and made fast our painter to her stern. We were then somewhat sheltered against the wind, and it would have been enjoyable enough if any fine fish had come to the hooks; but none did, and I soon got tired of it.

My friend, however, liked it very well, and not wishing to

disturb his enjoyment, but at the same time being anxious for something more exhilarating for myself, I proposed that he should remain with the man, and fish all day if he liked; but I would go back to the hotel, get my gun, and start for a tramp along the shore to Seaford.

This being agreed to, I was landed, and went back to our quarters. The landlord told me that the shortest way to the shore was by the path that runs between the railway line and the oyster-beds. He showed me how I was to get there, and I started.

There were flocks of crows and starlings about: the former I let alone, but the latter came in for three or four salutes, which I daresay they did not appreciate in their true light. Thus I went on, meeting with no birds of any other species until I had passed the large mill at the end of the first series of oyster-beds. There I found myself on a road, and turning to the right, I arrived on the sea-shore proper. There is a very high bank there, built to protect the next beds from any irruptions of the sea, and this bank comes mightily handy to a shooter. Some men were at work on it, mending it, and strengthening it with stakes driven into the sides, and furze twined in between the stakes. These men were about half a mile from the mill, and I then observed two white birds flying over the brink of a pond, and intending to all appearances to come over the wall and go off to sea. I tumbled down over the furze, stakes, and shingles, and, finger on trigger, I awaited their approach. They, however, changed their mind, and losing sight of them behind the sea-wall, I clambered up again, and found they had settled and were feeding about a hundred yards from the mill. I went down again, walked back to about the spot, and then popped on them, giving them a regular "startler." I killed one, missed the other, picked up the dead one, and found it to be a greenshank. I reloaded, and resumed my walk. I soon reached the old piles at Bishopstone, and found there a large and apparently well-to-do inn; but not feeling any calls for refreshment, I went on. The shore there is all shingle, and no more oyster-beds on the left, so that it was a very dreary affair, and a warm one withal, to tramp a couple of miles over the pebbles without seeing a bird about.

I passed the Coast Guard station, then the Fort, where several cannon were grimly yawning, and a mile away I perceived Seaford, a straggling, and, as guide-books say, a rising seaside resort. It may be rising, as it is built partly on the hill; but as to being in a prosperous way, if it is so, it only proves once more that there is no accounting for tastes, for a more lonely, dreary,

uncomfortable spot I have rarely visited. The neighbourhood is bare, the cliffs are precipitous and bare, the shingle is bare, and very rough: there are no walks about—nothing to entice visitors; then those who go there and enjoy it must be of a class whose cravings for the beauties of nature are easily satisfied. There was nobody about, and all the persons I saw were a boy and a little girl, a coast-guard, a soldier, and a publican—total, five.

I inquired as to the cliffs, whether there was any likelihood of getting sport beyond them, and as the report was highly unfavourable, I resolved to go back to Newhaven.

Walking back was out of the question, as there was nothing to shoot, so I inquired about a train. There would be one in half an hour, I was told. I went then to some hotel near the station, and asked for refreshments. They had none except drinkables—no eatables of any sort but biscuits.

"Could not you cook a steak or a couple of chops, or something of that sort?" I inquired of the landlord.

"No," he said, looking at his clock; "there is only five-and-twenty minutes to spare now before your train starts; so I should not have time to send into the town for the steak or chops and cook them."

I had therefore to do without.

Call that a "rising" town! What mockery!

It was in a gloomy state of mind that I took my seat in the train. To complete my tribulations, it began to rain, but I was under shelter then, and I did not mind. Quite the reverse; for when I bethought myself that my friend, in his open boat, would catch it before he could get back to the hotel, I could not help laughing. Such is human nature!

Well, our ride back was performed under a quarter of an hour, which is very creditable to the train of a "rising" seaside town; for it was carried out at the rate of twelve miles an hour, which, in this age of fast travelling, seems nevertheless rather slow. In fact, a decent "moke," with a hatful of oats as a preliminary, would lick the "local" into fits, methinks, if the fit came into his head.

When I arrived at the hotel, I found my companion sorting his fish, all under proper sizes I should think, and he was very happy, though wrapped up in a blanket, and his clothes steaming before the kitchen fire.

"Got any sport?" said he.

So I showed him my half-dozen starlings, and my one greenshank, with a grin.

"What sort of a place is Seaford?" he went on.

"Oh, lovely!" I said; "in fact, I can't find words to express my feelings on that point. Whenever you have a couple of days to spare, go there, and you will enjoy yourself immensely. Such a lovely place! Such splendid woods about, such nice roads, and such a pretty town! There! you never saw anything like it! Only, if ever you do so, take care to order your dinner a couple of days beforehand, for if you don't, you will have to do without."

"Then you have not had yours?" he said.

"No, hang it! I have not."

"Oh!" he said, "that explains the violent nature of your explanations. When you have been in the dining-room for half an hour, you will feel better I warrant."

I went, and did feel better, but I have not yet been able to digest my walking trip to Seaford.

October, 1875.

CHAPTER LII.

BRIGHTLINGSEA AND THE COLNE ESTUARY.

The owner of the twelve-ton cutter-yacht *Fairy* telegraphed to me, at *Bell's Life* office (having mislaid my private address), that he intended going shortly on a wildfowl shooting, yachting, and trawling expedition at Brightlingsea, where his yacht was lying, and that if I wished to join him I had better call and arrange matters verbally with him.

Now, I had not been in a yacht for several weeks, on account of Charlie having left the river some time since, and sailed in his yacht to Kingstown, from whence he intends cruising in the bay of Dublin. I was, therefore, very glad, entered heartily into the proposed scheme, and called accordingly the following day on the *Fairy's* owner. We there and then arranged matters to our mutual convenience and satisfaction.

We met the following afternoon at Bishopsgate, and went down by the 4.45 express, landing at Colchester about twenty minutes late, and having to change twice ere we reached our destination. These changes are always a great nuisance, the more so when you have shooting things to look after, a dog to get in and out of each train, &c. As, however, it cannot be helped, it has to be put up with, with as much good grace as one can assume.

We numbered three, viz. Mr. B. (the owner of the yacht), his brother Ernest, and your very humble servant, and a more merry party one would seldom see. We treated each other to sporting yarns and reminiscences, so that the journey, taking all in all, appeared uncommonly short. Both my companions were enthusiastic sportsmen, and it does one's heart good to be with such men. No kid-gloved tomfoolery there; we knew that the trip we had undertaken would have to be carried out in a sort of rough-and-ready fashion, and we entered into it with a will. We drew our plans, and divided our time in such a way as to provide fresh sport as soon as that in hand might flag; and we arrived, in the midst of our discussion, safe and sound and ready for any amount of fun, at Brightlingsea, the hour being somewhere about half-past

seven. Very hungry, too, we were, and very jolly, in spite of a drizzling rain which began to fall heavily, as if to damp our spirits.

The skipper of the *Fairy*, worthy Barnes, a man who knows well how to handle a craft and everything connected therewith, having won many racing prizes in good company, was waiting for us at the station; and as we trudged along in the dark streets, under his guidance, towards the hard, we questioned him as to the probabilities of our meeting with any sport.

"There are," said he, "plenty of fish and plenty of birds."

And with that assurance we made up our minds to have a jolly trip, and certainly this it turned out to be, for a jollier expedition could not be had anywhere at that time of year.

Brightlingsea railway station is nearly half a mile from the hard, and it was very lucky that Barnes was at hand to pilot us, for we had so many times to turn, and so many tacks to take in the dark, that it is more than doubtful whether we could have steered a clear course had we been left to our own devices.

At last we arrived on the shore; we launched the dingy, got in, and the skipper rowed us on board, where we found the lad, Walter, awaiting our arrival.

The table was already laid, and this was to us all a most welcome sight.

Without loss of time we sat down, and forthwith the two men brought in the dishes. Amongst these was one containing a two-and-a-half-pound steak, so extremely well cooked that it and its concomitant onions came in for a full share of our attention, and we did not leave a shred. (N.B. There were no ladies on board.) We then had an apple tart, straight from the chief Brightlingsea confectioner, so that what with one thing and another, good wines and so forth, we got on far better than at the hotel.

When dinner had been discussed, the cloth was removed, and pipes, cigars, and drinks were brought into requisition.

As we intended rising rather early to have a shy at the oxbirds, which, we could plainly hear, were whistling around us on both shores of the creek, we prepared to turn in early. The night was very dark then, and the sky looked squally. Whilst we were getting things ship-shape it began to rain again, still more heavily, and it was with a hope that the weather would turn somewhat brighter in the morning that we went to bed.

I woke up at six, and our host being sound asleep at the time, Ernest and I did not disturb him, but prepared quietly to go ashore by ourselves. However, as we were getting ready, the "guv'nor," as Walter called him, woke up, and taking matters at a glance, he declared that he was coming too, and we all went.

There was a large flock of oxbirds on the mud at the Point,

and towards these we went. Unfortunately, the tide was low, and the birds kept at the farthest end of the bank, close to the water's edge, so that the range was anything but a short one. When we got as near them as we could (about seventy yards), they rose, and we fired, killing only two or three.

Lightning, bottled up in gun-barrels, is the only thing that could neatly drive shot into these birds; gunpowder is too slow, though it seems to be so quick. But if you wish to ascertain the fact, just go in for some wildfowl shooting, and watch your companions' guns when they fire. Watch also the flocks, and then you will clearly perceive that at the very instant that the explosion takes place, the whole flock, which till then was maybe very compact, scatters very suddenly with dazzling rapidity, so as to make room for the shot I suppose. And in this they succeed so effectually, that it is very rarely one kills a large number of these birds when they are on the wing. This I have repeatedly noticed. Of course it will sometimes happen that they rush into the shot, especially in hard winter weather, when the flocks are a hundredfold more thick than they were then, and when, therefore, the birds that compose them have not individually such freedom of action as they then possessed, the weather being so mild that their companies were still thin.

Well, we got then on the sea-wall and walked on past the town, my two friends keeping their eyes on the shore-birds, whilst I and my spaniel Rover went below to beat the ditches. I expected to meet with a snipe or two, but found none. I had a shot at a heron, but as the said heron was an immense way off, I only succeeded in pricking one of his legs; at least I suppose so, for he shook it with considerable energy, and we then went back to breakfast.

Chemin faisant, as we were walking down the shore, we passed one of the Colne Oyster Fishery Company's boats, and this led us to talk about oysters.

"Last winter," I said, "I was here on this river, on a wildfowling expedition (see in 'Wildfowl Trips,' 'The Colne Estuary'), and I remember well having a couple of dozen or so of oysters on board an oyster-boat, whilst coming across from the railway, past Wivenhoe to the other shore; those oysters had been just dredged and were awfully nice, it makes my mouth water to think about them, and I vote we get some for to-night."

The proposition was carried *nem. con.*, and Mr. B., our host, who is an epicure and therefore a good caterer, on our return told Barnes to provide these delicacies of the season at the earliest convenience.

"All right, sir," said he, "as soon as I get ashore I will get some;" and he did.

The next turn he took in the dingy he went to the hard, and then brought us as fair samples of oysters as one could wish to get anywhere. Oh! those lovely molluscs! with what regret do I remember that they are gone, and nought left save the remembrance! Oysters, fresh from their beds, flavoured with ozone, distilling, as they are brought under one's nose, all the sweet scents of the salt water, are widely different from those one gets in the ordinary routine of London life. In the latter case they have probably been lying in fresh water, plus a little oatmeal, for several days, whilst in the former case nought save the salt water of the sea has ever touched them. The jaded London oyster requires the sarcastic vinegar and the pungent pepper to bring out its innate flavour, but the oysters fresh from the billows require no such condiments.

But enough of oysters; suffice it to say that eventually, when we began pitching into ours, although both Barnes and Walter were pretty deft hands at opening them, we were still better hands at swallowing them, and it was all they could do to keep pace with us.

Anyhow, oyster lovers, make a note of this: whenever you want a treat, go to Brightlingsea, take your chair on the hard, settle yourselves there, and get a couple of smart fellows to open your molluscs for you; and if you don't agree with me that such a meal is worthy of a mythological god, then all I can say is, you have no taste.

Well, after breakfast we wore round to the hard, where we landed with our guns and the dog; and we made our way through the town and past the railway station, to the other shore of the river, intending to shoot over it and over an inland marsh, where we had subsequently leave to shoot snipe, &c., *if* we could find any.

We tried hard on the sea-shore first, but although there were shoals of birds, they were, I am grieved to say, totally unapproachable.

We went then to the inland marsh, but as, after half an hour's tramp, and the dog doing well his duty, we saw that no birds were to be found, we very wisely made up our minds to return. In this decision a shower assisted us, and we had to remain for shelter at the railway station, some ten minutes or so before we could venture out. On our way back we entered an inn, and had luncheon there. This over, we discussed matters.

"Our only chance of success," I remarked, "is to take the dingy and get round along the shore. As we move on, the flocks

that will get disturbed are sure to take to their wings and fly over the water, when we will have a chance of popping at them. But stalking them now is an impossible feat. They are too well fed as yet, and therefore too wary. Before we could get within 150 yards of them, they would be off and away to sea. Let us therefore get the dingy and have a row down or up the Reach."

My companions agreeing with me in this, we went on board, took our ammunition and a long duck-gun we had brought down with us from town, and Walter getting into the dingy with us, he took the sculls and we went.

We had a shot almost directly, our host bagging two or three birds, his brother picking up ditto one or two, and this brightened us up somewhat. A little farther on another company came by, but passed a long way away. Still we banged at them, so as to get others on the move. Then we had some enormous flocks of lapwings on shore, and Ernest had a shy at them with the *fusil de rampart*. We thought he had hit one, and Walter rowed us towards shore to see whether what we saw was a bird or a lump of mud. Whilst going there a company came by and I fired, wounding two, who settled on shore and began to run.

Well, we found the boat could not reach shore, on account of the shallowness of the water; so Walter, who had his long sea-boots on, undertook to wade ashore, and went, but he could not find the birds when he got there, so he came back and shoved us off once more.

We fired another half-dozen shots, and darkness setting in, we turned the dingy's head towards the yacht, where we found a roaring fire and a warm cabin, most acceptable comforts, as the air was coldish in the open estuary.

When we had changed our boots, socks, &c., we talked over the incidents of the day, and agreed that a week's hard frost just then would have been a most desirable event, in order to make the birds a little more sociable. As things were then standing, although we had seen perhaps a couple of thousand of birds of different species, such as lapwings, gray-plovers, redshanks, greenshanks, oyster-catchers, curlews, oxbirds, sandpipers, stints, a duck or two, &c., yet we had only been able to bag some seven or eight small birds, and that was not highly satisfactory.

As soon as we were ready to sit round the table, dinner was served, during which meal we were favoured with another downpour. However, we were under shelter then, in the cosy cabin, and as we had no occasion to face again the strong wind and the rain, everything was for the best as far as we were concerned.

The following day was to be almost exclusively devoted to sailing and trawling in the estuary, and orders were accordingly

given to Barnes to have an early breakfast ready, so that we might weigh anchor as soon as possible.

At a quarter to six I woke up, went on deck, found the morning bright and fine, the clouds had quite disappeared, and everything promised us a lovely day for our sea-fishing trip.

When I re-entered the cabin, I found Ernest awake and yawning.

"What sort of weather is it?" said he.

"Lovely," I returned; "let us go ashore and have a pop at the oxbirds, there is a shoal of them on the shore."

"All right," he said; "I am game."

And he got up and got ready. We jumped into the dingy, took the dog and went by ourselves.

We landed behind the Point, so as to try what surprise would do towards making a bag, and my companion nailed two or three oxbirds at one shot.

I went with the dog across the marsh, found nothing, walked up to the bend near a creek, and then finding that I could not wade across, I went down the bank and signalled Ernest, who was in the dingy, to come and pick me up. We then had another shot at a company, and turned back for breakfast, after which all hands turned on deck to set sail, and we dropped down the Brightlingsea creek into the river Colne.

The sails being set taut, fore and aft, the trawl was the next object of interest. Barnes had rigged it himself on a new beam, and was confident of a good catch of fish.

"We have got," said he, "everything in our favour so far; therefore if the net is all right and does not give way, we are bound to get a good many fish aboard before we turn back to our moorings.

We took a tack towards West Mersea or East Mersea, anyhow towards that one of the Merseas where one of the professional puntmen, a good many years ago now, was once said to have bagged at one shot £20 worth of birds. The case, at the time, was commented upon very extensively in the papers, and excited considerable interest, being by far the largest and most successful single shot that had ever been fired either before or since. Of course the swivel-gun that did the deed, or anything like it, must have carried an enormous load of shot to bring to bag a sufficient number of birds to represent a value of £20 cash; and all things considered, and without meaning any offence, notwithstanding the so-called authenticity of the shot, I am more than inclined to doubt it. I have seen once thirty-eight birds killed at one shot, but I have never seen or heard of anything better than that, barring that Mersea incident. Now, if anyone will only take the slight trouble

to think for a moment of the area which is covered by thirty-eight birds, he will admit, readily enough, that when the birds are rather "packed," as they are apt to be in severe winters, a good swivel gun, with a pound and a half of No. 2 shot, will send enough pellets and a few to spare to cover that area and nail the birds. But £20 worth of birds represent at least 200 birds at two shillings apiece, and that price is a very liberal allowance. Now, where pray is the gun on swivel, or not on swivel, that will send shot in sufficient quantities and with sufficient force to sweep the area covered by 200 birds? The feat is impossible and incredible. Of course it is a tradition. All puntmen have their old traditions, and it does their hearts good to revert to them; but no, thanks, this pill is rather too big to swallow, the 200 birds or £20 single shot is sticking in my throat, and I cannot by any means bring my stubborn head to admit it.

Pour revenir à nos poissons, we cast the trawl, and made it snug and taut, about a mile from the north shore of the Blackwater, and shaped our course towards the white buoy, at the north shore of the Colne. There was a brig at anchor there, having probably sent its gig ashore for fresh provisions or water, and a yawl of some twenty-five tons was going across, trawling like ourselves. Barring these two craft and a few fishermen, nothing was to be seen on the deep green sea. Talking thus poetically does not necessarily entail speaking the strict truth, for the sea there is *not* deep, as we can personally testify, for we got stuck on a sand-bank for some two or three minutes, and though we all stood in the bows, and two of us shoved her with the sweeps, she would not move. However, slackening the mainsail, and the tide flowing in, got us over the difficulty without further mishap.

We took up the trawl near the buoy, and it was with no inconsiderable excitement that we opened the bag and tumbled out as its contents a heterogeneous mass of fish and sea-weeds, which we forthwith proceeded to clear up.

We had a fine whiting about a pound weight, plenty of crabs and sand-eels; some of these last were beauties, which it was a pity to waste, as they would have done beautifully for bait, but we had, through an oversight, brought no lines on board, and therefore could not try hooking, so we returned the eels to their native element. We had also a few shrimps, a dozen bullheads or stingers, half-a-dozen small brill, and a multitude of plaice and dabs and flounders, most of which were very small. The sorting of our fish took us a good quarter of an hour. The brill, crabs, eels, and small fry were pitched overboard, and we only kept the whiting and the finest of our flat-fish.

Meanwhile, Barnes, who had found a small hole ripped open

in the side of the net, had sat down with twine and knife, and proceeded to mend the rent.

Whilst this was going on, Ernest took the tiller, and under Barnes' directions sailed the yacht across again towards the Blackwater for another cast. When everything was ready, and we had reached a new field for action, "Now, gentlemen," said our skipper cheerily, "will you please lend a hand for the trawl?"

We cast it again, and then having nothing to do for the next half-hour, we went below and called for oysters, which Barnes and Walter set about opening with all diligence. We then had a glass of sherry, Mr. B. and I had a few games at *écarté*, we smoked a pipe or two, and then it was almost time again to see how the trawl was getting on.

We were in fact talking about it, when I spied a diver some 200 yards away on our starboard side. "See it?" I said to Ernest.

"Yes," said he; "let us go after him."

No sooner said than done; we dived into the cabin, collared our guns, drew up the dingy, and jumping into her, we turned her head towards the spot where we had seen the bird. It was then in a line between the yacht and the brig, but when we rowed towards the spot the bird was nowhere to be seen. So we had our row for nothing, and, much to our mutual consternation, we then saw that Barnes and Walter were getting up the trawl in our absence. We went back and found the catch poorer by far than the first one. In fact, none but small fish had been caught that time. Still, it was very amusing to see the contents of the bag and to sort them, and we entered very heartily into the fun of the thing.

As we had not caught anything very noteworthy, it was agreed we should have another trawling over new ground.

Ernest and I thought a row along the shore with our guns would prove an interesting diversion, but the great distance we stood at precluded, at the time, our entertaining the notion. Nevertheless, we made a note of it, and we all agreed to go towards evening. In the interval of this discussion the net had been again sent overboard, and for a change we again had a "go" at the oysters; in fact, we did little else but "feed" all day. We all felt sharp set, and it would have done a doctor's heart good to see us all "wiring" into the provisions.

At about 4 P.M. the trawl was hauled up, when to begin with, we found an enormous rent all along the side, down almost to the bag. Of course with such a casualty, no great number of fish could be expected, as the best were sure to have bolted through the large aperture, and accordingly we found but a lot of rubbish,

amidst which two or three fair-sized plaice and dabs were picked up. This concluded our trawling.

That eventually we would have had far better fun was well known to us, and it was unfortunate our net thus forsook us at the right moment, when its services were most needed, for we were then nearing a spot where whiting abounded. This was most amply proved by the catches which the crew of a yawl managed to bag in the course of a day. They got some twenty dozen of whiting, their skipper told us, and some of these were remarkably handsome and fine fish. They caught several large skates; we only had small ones. They had two or three large brill; we had only little ones. But whether we caught them or they did, it does not signify one whit. The fish were there, that was the main point; and those of my readers who would like to try the Colne estuary with nets or with lines, cannot do better than find out, in mid-channel, a fair deep ground just in a line with the tower and the windmill. That is the spot where our neighbours succeeded so well, and no doubt brilliant sport could be had there with lines and proper bait.

Mudworms can be had at Brightlingsea in abundance, as the flats abound with them, and plenty of men and boys go regularly at low-tide with pails and spades to dig for them, so that there is no difficulty whatever experienced in the procuring of these commodities; in fact, any amount of worms can be had at a tide's notice, and of course that is a great point for those sea-fishermen who like to try angling, or hooking, as it is most commonly called when no rods are used.

Well, as we could no longer use our trawl on account of the slit, we went back towards Brightlingsea, and when we got within half a mile of the shore we took to the dingy, the three of us, and left the skipper and the lad to take charge of the yacht.

Upon reaching the shore there were three or four herons at various distances, stalking on the mud, any number of lapwings on the flats, and curlews, oxbirds, &c., in abundance. My host landed with his brother to try a creek from whence seven ducks had risen, but they found it impassable, and I had to row back for them.

We then shot several oxbirds, landed once more, fired several times, besmeared ourselves generally, and enjoyed it so awfully that we never came back to the yacht but when it was quite dark, and then we had to grope our way amidst the craft in harbour to find the yacht. At last, the riding-light turned in sight.

"*Fairy* ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," from Walter.

And in a couple of minutes we were alongside, and clambered

on board, tired, hungry, and very muddy, but withal very happy and contented, and that was the main point.

That being our last evening on board, we began picking up our things and packing them up, in readiness for our early start in the morning.

We then had dinner, a long chat, drinks, and cigars or pipes, and slept our last night in our respective berths.

At a little past seven o'clock A.M. we made off, and took the quarter to eight o'clock train, which brought us back to town at a quarter past ten, all the better in mind and in body for our glorious trip.

In conclusion, I must tender my best thanks to my host for his courtesy in inviting me to this excursion, and to his brother for his sociable comradeship.

Neither can I conclude without remarking, *en passant*, that a good deal of our comfort rested in the hands of Barnes and of his youthful companion, and that both these worthies did everything that lay in their power to make our floating domicile a comfortable one.

This, I may add, is a very great thing in trips of the kind, and I therefore only give justice where it is due, when I state that both the skipper and Walter, besides a tangible recognition of their services, deserved our hearty thanks, and got them; and may you never, reader, meet with a worse pair, whenever you treat yourself to a sail, short or otherwise, over the sea.

As regards the meagre sea-fowl-shooting sport related in the last few chapters, the season of the year (October) duly accounts for it. Subsequently, I met with excellent sport in sundry places, the narratives of which excursions I hope, at some early date, to place before the shooting public.

Now it will no doubt have been noticed that, throughout the shooting-trips mentioned in the present work, I have made no mention whatsoever of any of the new gunpowders which have of late been offered to the shooting public. This, however, was no omission on my part, for as I had so far systematically stuck to the old black powders, and declined trying any of the new compounds until something really tempting was known about the latter, I therefore could say nothing as to their merits or demerits.

However, after the foregoing papers were written, such a deal of correspondence took place in the sporting papers anent the alleged great power, and other satisfactory shooting qualities, of the Schultze gunpowder, that I felt bound as a sportsman to try it, and as a sporting *littérateur* to state my experience thereof. The latter I cannot do otherwise than give here, so as to make my

present work keep pace with the times. Well, then, for every kind of shooting I have found the Schultze gunpowder, in every way, preferable to the old black powders. It shoots very hard, and does not foul the barrels so much as our old black friends do. Neither does it produce such dense smoke. The latter is a quality which all practical shooters know how to appreciate, for nothing disgusts a sportsman so much as to find himself (just when firing a second barrel would be most desirable) surrounded by a thick, hazy smoke, which effectually prevents him from taking either proper aim or any aim at all. Now the smoke produced from the Schultze powder is thin, and its volume so small that, as a matter of fact, I have never found it interfering with my shooting.

But where, above all, the powder shines best, is in the marshes or at sea, where the air is always more or less damp. With the ordinary black powders, every practical marsh or sea-fowl shooter has noticed that, in hazy or damp weather, not only the killing power of the powders was interfered with to an alarming extent, but their naturally thick smoke was then to such a degree increased in opacity and volume as to render them altogether very unsatisfactory and very unreliable.

Now, according to my own personal experience, the Schultze remains very steady throughout, and its shooting power I find is but little, if at all, affected by any change in the weather. It shoots very uniformly, and therefore all cartridges may be loaded in the same manner throughout the season.

To resume, then, I certainly think that the Schultze is the best gunpowder I have ever had to deal with, and I am so far pleased with it, that I do not intend using any other for the future. Its killing power, its comparative cleanliness, its absence of thick smoke, and its moderate recoil, especially for wildfowl and sea-fowl shooting (where heavy breech-loaders of tremendous bores are used), make it altogether suit my requirements to a T; and I, therefore, feel satisfied that I can emphatically recommend its use to my shooting readers.

This brings my volume to a close, and I now, friendly reader, leave my work in your hands.

THE END.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS, CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.